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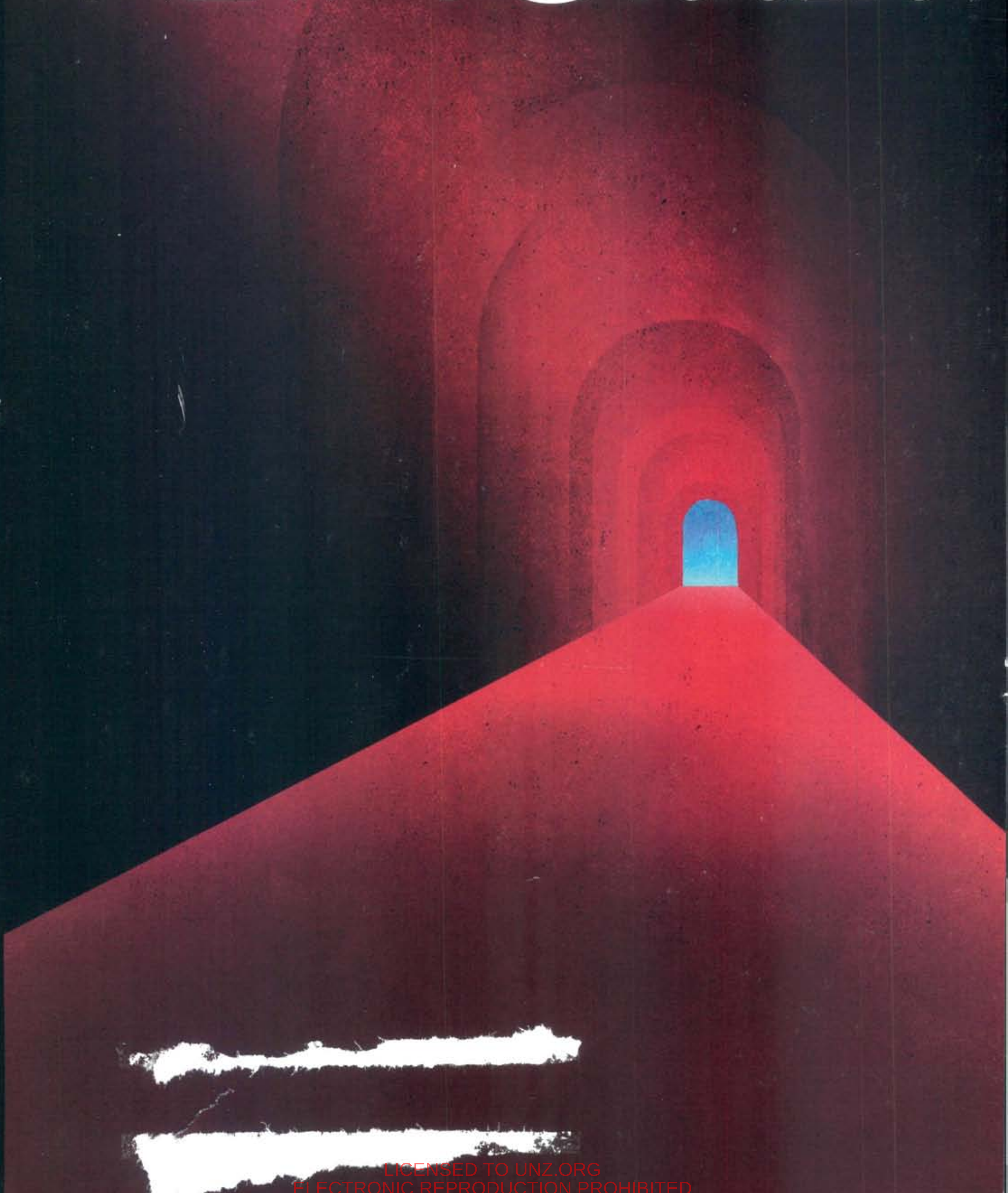
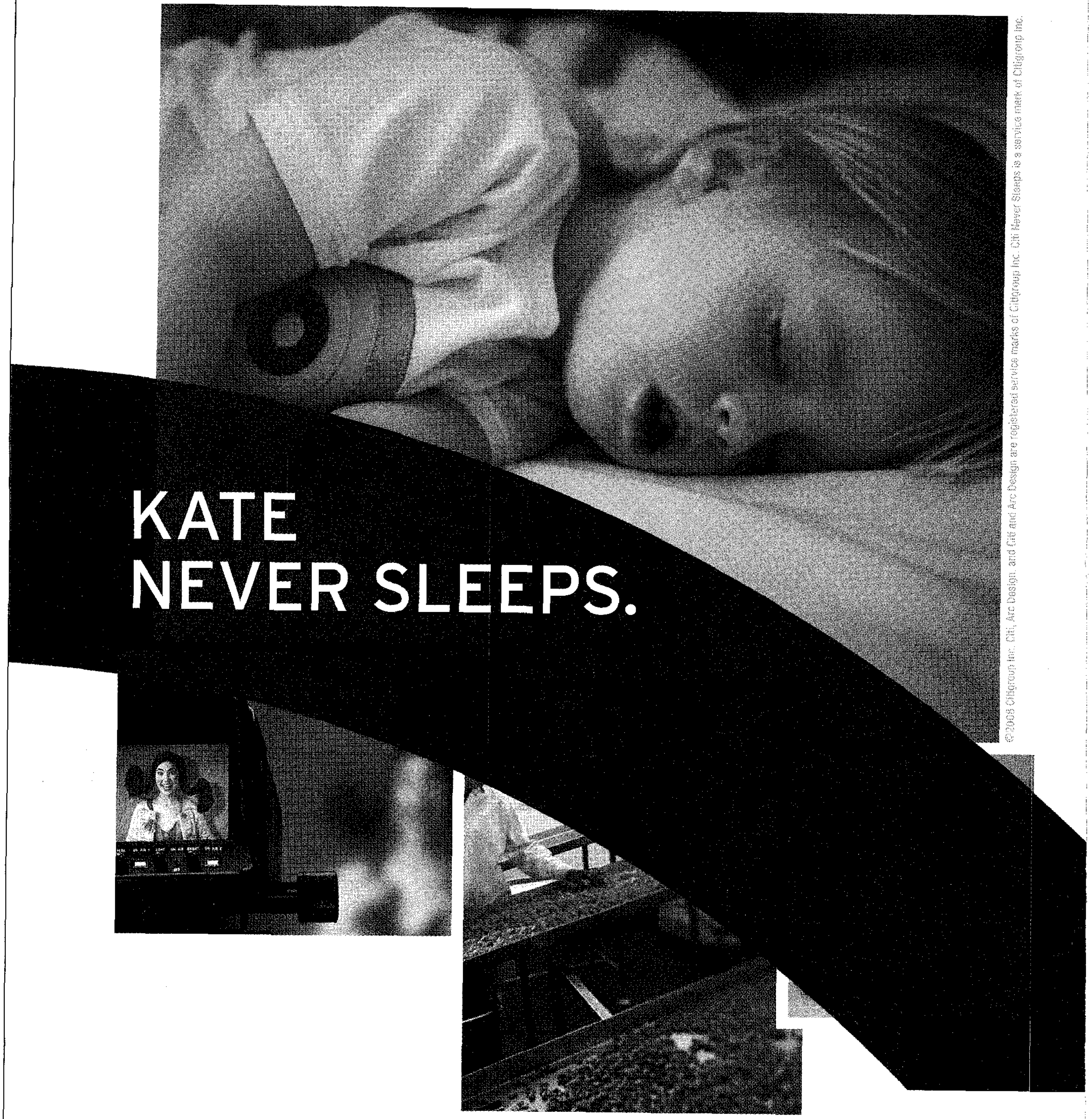
THE NEW YORKER

NOV. 10, 2008

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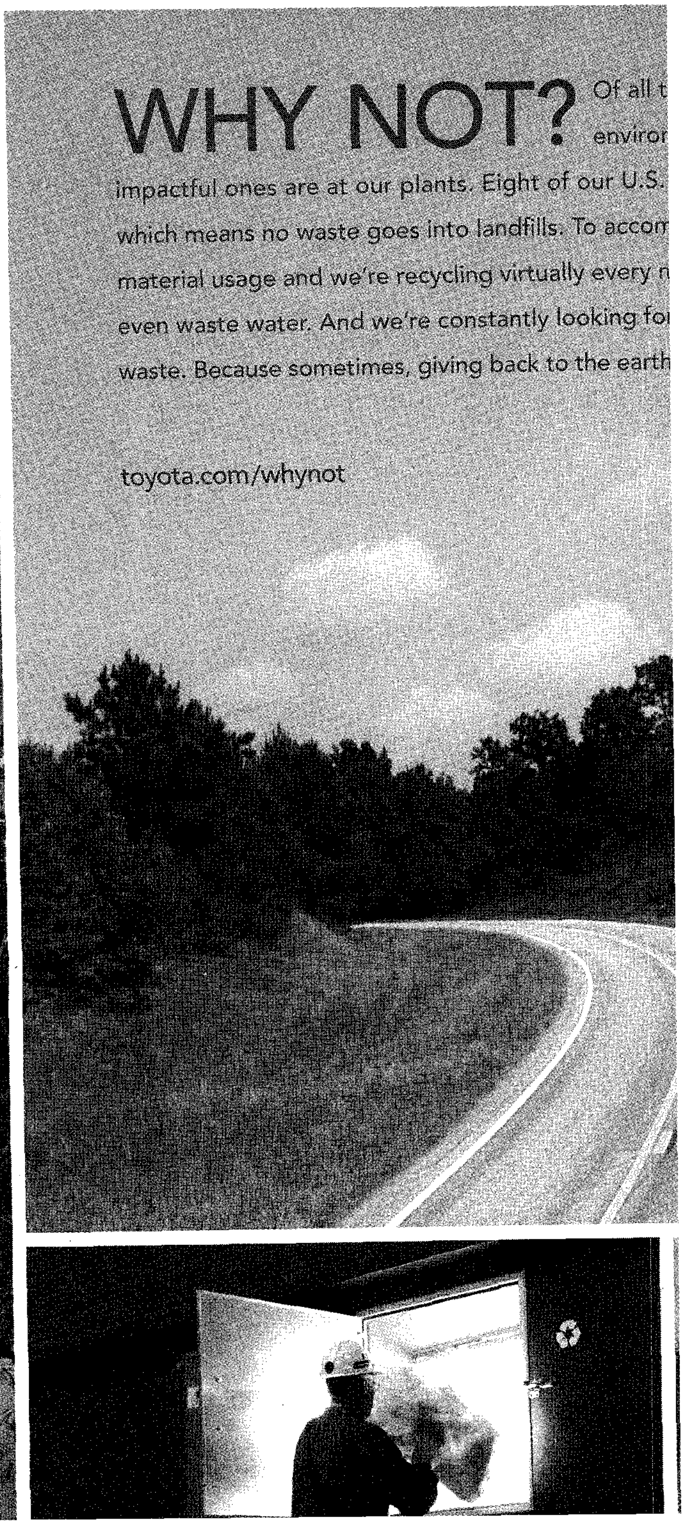

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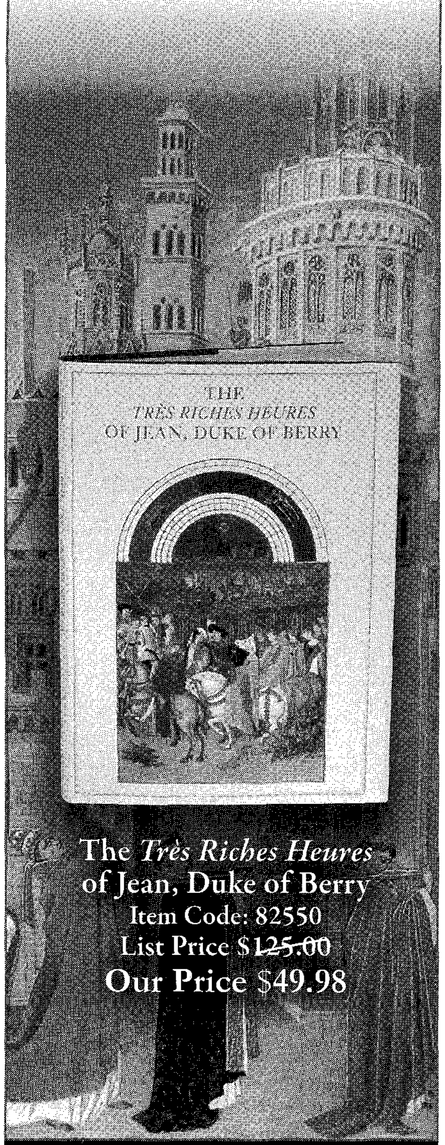
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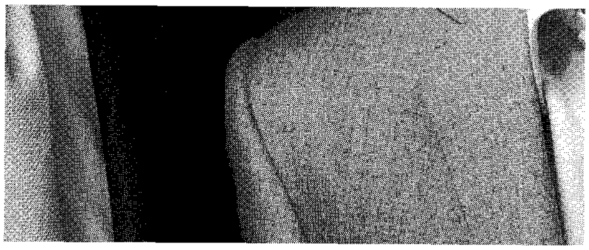
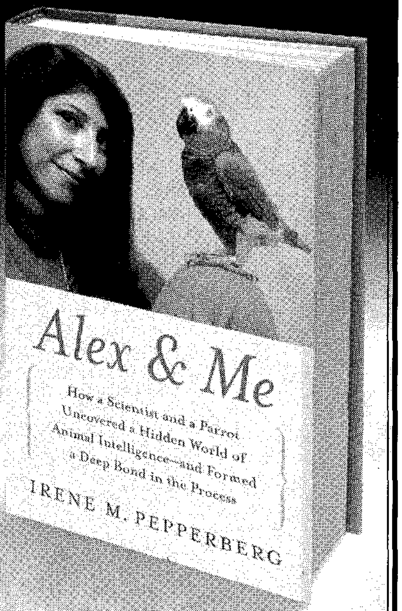


"Sometimes a single individual changes the world, even if it is a parrot."
—Frans de Waal, author of OUR INNER APE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CONTRIBUTORS

Malcolm Gladwell ("The Uses of Adversity," p. 36) is the author of "Outliers: The Story of Success," which comes out later this month.

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 29) has published six books, including "Ghost Wars," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize, and "The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century."

Philip Gourevitch (The Talk of the Town, p. 30) is the editor of *The Paris Review*. His book "Standard Operating Procedure," a collaboration with Errol Morris, was published in May.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 35) writes a regular column on economics and finance. He also has a blog on newyorker.com.

Woody Allen (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 42) has been a contributor to the magazine for many years.

Alma Guillermoprieto ("Days of the Dead," p. 44) writes about Latin America for the magazine. She is currently a Tinker Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago.

Jack Gilbert (Poem, p. 59) will publish a new collection of poems, "The Dance Most of All," in April.

Ian Parker ("The Bright Side," p. 52) is a staff writer.

John Seabrook ("Suffering Souls," p. 64) recently published "Flash of Genius and Other True Stories of Invention."

Wells Tower (Fiction, p. 74) will publish his début collection of short stories, "Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned," in March.

Rae Armantrout (Poem, p. 77) is a professor at the University of California, San Diego. She has written ten books of poems, including "Versed," which is due out in February.

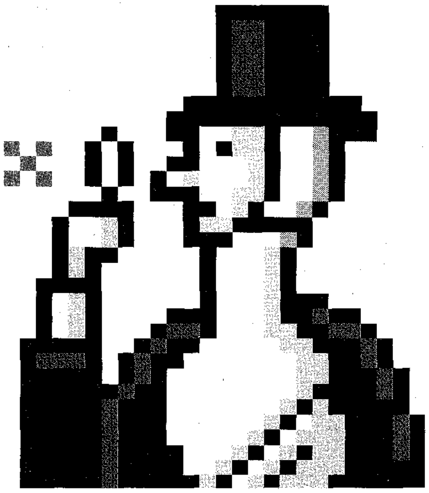
John Lanchester (A Critic at Large, p. 80) won this year's E. M. Forster award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His latest book, "Family Romance," a memoir, is available in paperback.

Hilton Als (The Theatre, p. 88) is the Joan Leiman Jacobson Visiting Nonfiction Writer in English and American Studies at Smith College.

Brian Stauffer (Cover) is a Miami-based illustrator, designer, and animator. His work is featured in several publications, including "American Illustration 27," which comes out later this month.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Steve Coll, Hendrik Hertzberg, George Packer, and guest bloggers respond to the election returns, plus the climactic episode of the Campaign Trail podcast, hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden.* / More blogs: *James Surowiecki* on the economy, *Sasha Frere-Jones* on pop music, plus the Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and Goings On. / Audio: *John Lanchester* talks about modernism, finance, and his banker father. / Slide show: the art of Joan Miró. / Ask the Author: *John Seabrook* takes questions about psychopaths. / From the archive: complete campaign coverage. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.



THE MAIL

ARTISTIC GENIUS

Malcolm Gladwell weaves a few interesting narratives into an engaging and thought-provoking article ("Late Bloomers," October 20th). Those narratives, however, don't necessarily support the broader conclusions toward which Gladwell appears to point us. Artists flourish whenever and however they flourish, sometimes repeatedly and often not at all. The trajectory of each artistic career is a complex, unpredictable blend of individual nature and societal nurture. There are no patterns and no templates. Each artist's personal story is one-of-a-kind and, ultimately, irrelevant. The most sensible artists, like the best generals, are focussed on, and fighting, the next battle, their own.
Harvey Gordon
Glen Arbor, Mich.

Considering the prodigy Picassos and late-blooming Cézannes of the world, Gladwell writes of the misconception that "in both cases, the assumption is that the prodigy and the late bloomer are fundamentally the same, and that late blooming is simply genius under conditions of market failure." As a psychotherapist, I find the implications of this statement powerful. The concept of genius as precocity affirms the defeating psychology of embracing underachievement in adulthood. If we hold the belief that genius reveals itself only early in life, we excuse ourselves from the need to persevere. Gladwell's article encourages each of us to question whether we have simply not yet arrived at our individual point of greatness. If we choose to believe his hypothesis, we open ourselves to a life forever full of the possibility of greater satisfaction, regardless of whether the final product is one of genius.
Erika Malm Cooley
Santa Monica, Calif.

MIND YOUR MANNERS

Elizabeth Kolbert, in reviewing a new biography of Emily Post, concludes that the readers of Post's books learned that "to advance up the social hierarchy . . . the key was conformity" (Books, October 20th). Advancing in society was no doubt part of the motivation for etiquette, but there were others as well. The era in which Post started writing was a period of great changes in technology and in society—from motion pictures and automobiles to the Jazz Age and Prohibition. These changes brought new economic power and social freedom to the middle class, and that, in turn, created significant social anxieties. There was an ethical dimension to etiquette as well. No less an authority than Eleanor Roosevelt (who authored the "Book of Common Sense Etiquette," published in 1962) wrote that kindness and morality had to be reflected in rules of etiquette. She let her readers know that unless good manners "are based in sincere goodwill, they are meaningless."
Edwin Battistella
Professor of English
Southern Oregon University
Ashland, Ore.

TEXTING ECONOMICS

Louis Menand, in his article on texting, overlooks a large portion of the world's population—those for whom having a phone at all is a luxury ("Thumbspeak," October 20th). I took to texting while living in Uganda, where it costs less than a penny to send a text, but considerably more to place a phone call. In much of the developing world, people don't pay for a monthly plan but buy their time as they go. Why place one phone call when you can send a hundred text messages instead? In Uganda, and, I imagine, in other countries with similar economic challenges, texting is not going anywhere anytime soon.
Hannah Harlow
Cambridge, Mass.

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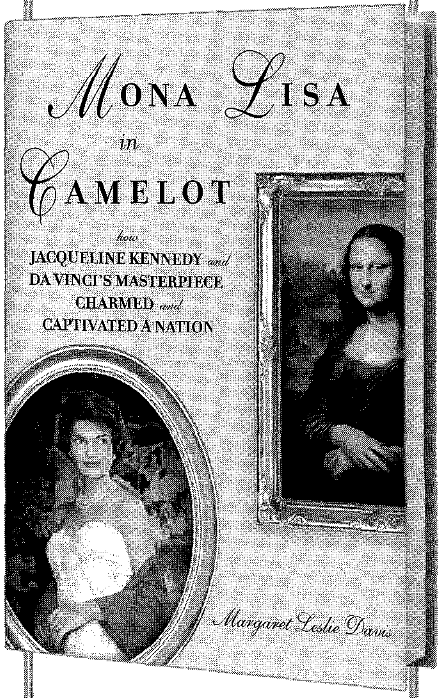

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
TAP ROOTS

York Theatre Company mounts "My Vaudeville Man!," a musical about the early-twentieth-century tap dancer Jack Donahue. Lynne Taylor-Corbett choreographs and directs; Shonn Wiley co-choreographs and stars. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
ANNIE WAY

The singer Little Annie, who has also gone by the names Annie Anxiety and Annie Bandez, interprets songs made popular by Frank Sinatra, Tina Turner, Jacques Brel, U2, and others on "When Good Things Happen to Bad Pianos," the new album she recorded with her longtime collaborator, the pianist Paul Wallfisch. The pair appear at Santos Party House. (See page 13.)

ART
HUE-BORN

In the early seventies, the Memphis photographer William Eggleston almost single-handedly legitimized the use of color film in deceptively casual pictures of everyday subjects. "William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video, 1961-2008," at the Whitney, traces his career in some hundred and fifty works, including his rarely seen video diary, "Stranded in Canton." (See page 15.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HELL BOY

Berlioz designed his "Damnation de Faust" as a "dramatic legend" that blurred the line between opera and oratorio. The Met has hired the innovative director Robert Lepage to stage it in a new production that features Susan Graham, Marcello Giordani, and John Relyea in the principal roles, conducted by James Levine. (See page 19.)

MOVIES
NATIVE SON

The French director Arnaud Desplechin has built a career on the subject of family and friends. The week before the opening of his new feature, "A Christmas Tale," IFC Center offers a retrospective of his films, including "L'Aimée," about the sale of his parents' house, and "La Sentinelle," a thriller centered on a medical school. (See page 25.)

"Arias with a Twist," at HERE Arts Center. Photograph by Gus Powell.

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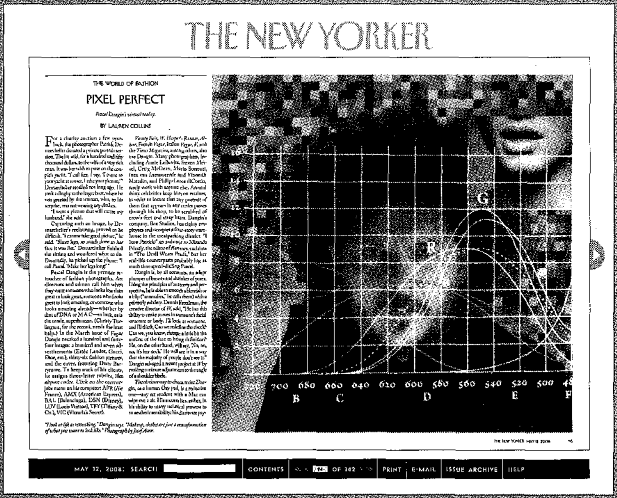

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AMERICAN BUFFALO
Robert Falls directs a revival of David Mamet's 1976 play, about two junk-store habitués who involve a teen-ager in their plan to steal a coin collection. Cedric the Entertainer, Haley Joel Osment, and John Leguizamo star. In previews. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

BACK BACK BACK
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new play by Itamar Moses ("The Four of Us"), about three baseball players who are involved in a steroid-use investigation. Daniel Aukin directs. In previews. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL
Stephen Daldry directs the musical based on the movie, about a working-class boy who discovers a love for ballet. Elton John wrote the music, and Lee Hall wrote the book and lyrics. In previews. (Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

BURY THE DEAD
Transport Group presents this 1936 drama by Irwin Shaw, about a group of soldiers who rise from the dead. In previews. Opens Nov. 9. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

DAWN
The Flea presents a drama by Thomas Bradshaw, about an alcoholic who tries to stay sober for the sake of his wife and children. Previews begin Nov. 9. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

DIVIDING THE ESTATE
Horton Foote's comedy about a Texas family moves to Broadway after a run in 2006 at Primary Stages. Elizabeth Ashley, Arthur French, Hallie Foote, Penny Fuller, and Gerald McRaney star. Michael Wilson directs. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

FARRAGUT NORTH
At Atlantic Theatre Company, Doug Hughes directs the world première of Beau Willimon's new drama, about the young press secretary of a Presidential candidate. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE FOOTAGE
At the Flea, a drama written by Joshua Scher and directed by Claudia Zelevansky, about the effects of an online role-playing game on a group of friends. In previews. Opens Nov. 8. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS
Martha Clarke's dance-theatre piece from 1984, derived from the Hieronymus Bosch painting, gets a revival. Previews begin Nov. 8. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

HOME
In Signature Theatre Company's second production of the season celebrating the Negro Ensemble Company, three actors perform twenty-five roles in Samm-Art Williams's 1980 play. Set in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, it tells the story of a man who leaves his family in North Carolina for New York City. Previews begin Nov. 11. (555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

MINDGAME
Anthony Horowitz wrote this thriller, about a crime writer who travels to an insane asylum to interview a serial killer. Ken Russell (who directed the film "Tommy") makes his New York stage directorial début. Keith Carradine stars. In previews. Opens Nov. 9. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

MOUTH TO MOUTH
The New Group opens its season with the U.S. première of a new play by Kevin Elyot, about a gay writer living with AIDS, and his friend, a woman who is very attached to her teen-age son. Mark Brokaw directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 6. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

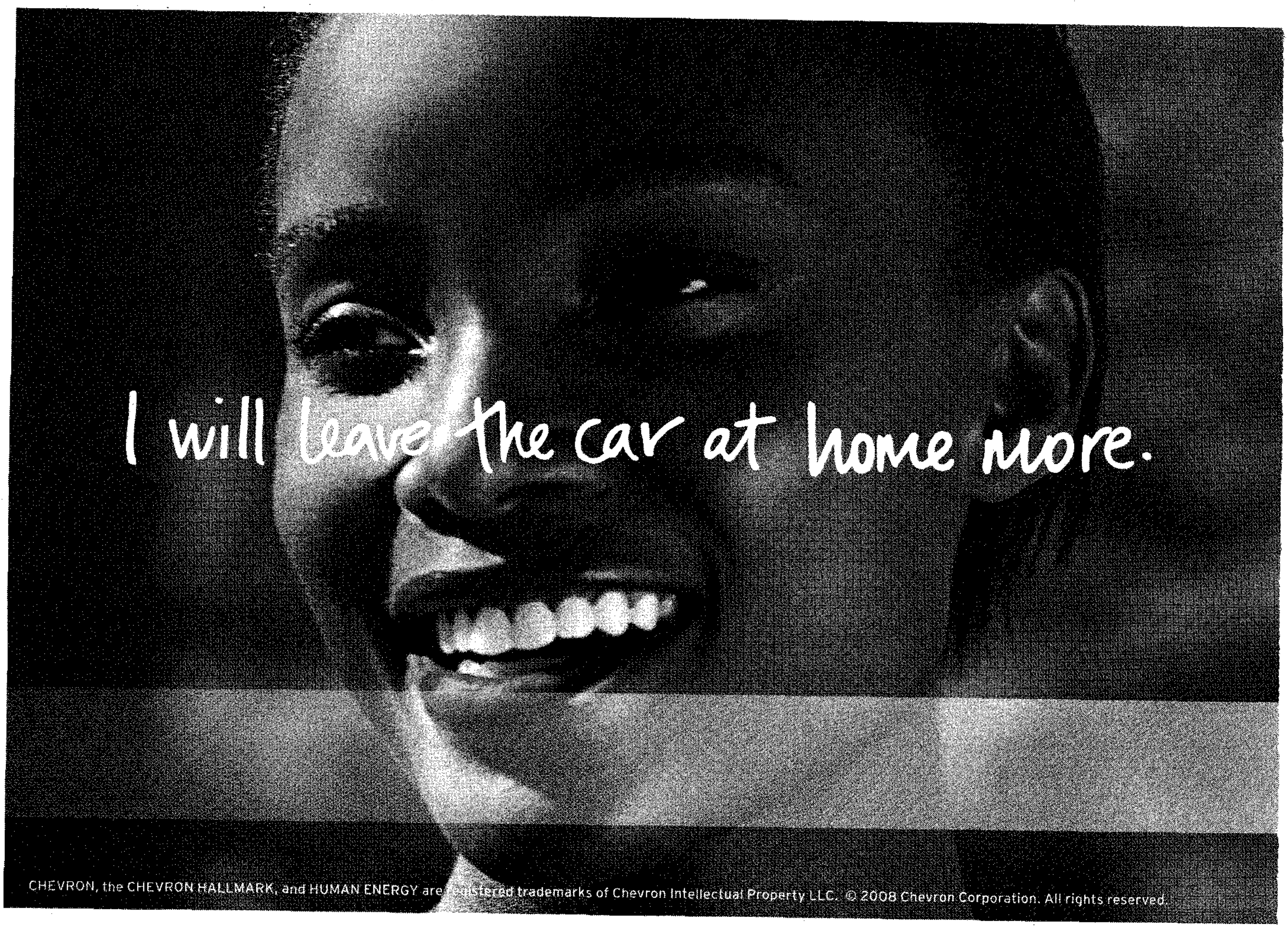
MY VAUDEVILLE MAN!
York Theatre Company presents a new musical based on the life of the eccentric-tap-dancing star Jack Donahue. With a book by Jeff Hochhauser, music by Bob Johnston, and lyrics by both, based on Donahue's "Letters of a Hoofer to His Ma." Lynne Taylor-Corbett directs and choreographs. Previews begin Nov. 7. (St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820.)

ROAD SHOW
John Doyle directs the New York première of a musical by Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics) and John Weidman (book), about brothers who start out in the Alaska gold rush and end up participating in the Florida real-estate boom of the thirties. Michael Cerveris and Alexander Gemignani star. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

SATURN RETURNS
Noah Haidle wrote this play, in which a radiologist (played by three different actors) confronts three women at various stages of his life. In previews. Opens Nov. 10. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

SHOGUN MACBETH
Pan Asian Repertory Theatre launches its season with this adaptation, by John R. Briggs, of the Shakespeare tragedy. Directed by Ernest Abuba, with choreography by Sachiyo Ito. In previews. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

SHREK THE MUSICAL
Dreamworks Theatricals presents the musical adaptation of the film, with a book and lyrics by David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Lindsay-Abaire ("Rabbit Hole") and music by Jeanine Tesori ("Caroline, or Change"). Jason Moore ("Avenue Q") directs; Brian d'Arcy James and Sutton Foster star. Previews begin Nov. 8. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

SLEEPWALK WITH ME
Mike Birbiglia wrote and stars in this new comedy, about the experiences of a chronic somnambulist. Seth Barrish directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 11. (Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

STREAMERS
Roundabout Theatre Company presents David Rabe's drama from 1976, set in 1965, about four soldiers in boot camp in Virginia, waiting to be sent to Vietnam. In previews. Opens Nov. 11. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

TAKING OVER
Danny Hoch wrote and performs this meditation on the gentrification of New York City, in a New York première. Tony Taccone directs. Previews begin Nov. 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

TWELFTH NIGHT
The all-female cast of the Queen's Company puts on the Shakespeare comedy. Opens Nov. 8. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

NOW PLAYING

THE GRAND INQUISITOR
At New York Theatre Workshop, Peter Brook directs an adaptation of the Inquisitor section of "The Brothers Karamazov." (Reviewed in this issue.) (79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMETHING
The monologuist Mike Daisey, who claims to have read "On Thermonuclear War" when he was ten, returns to Joe's Pub with an Everyman's history of the military-industrial complex. Daisey frames the piece with an account of his visit to Trinity, the testing site of the Manhattan Project, where he meets a man who collects nuclear waste in his garage. Along the way, he holds forth on Benjamin Franklin (a "badass"), the Patriot Act, and the successive heads of the Department of Homeland Security (noting Michael Chertoff's resemblance to Skeletor). As always, Daisey—part citizen journalist, part Cookie Monster—spits out his arguments with an angry relish, drawing mesmerizing conclusions from his well of wrath. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THE LANGUAGE OF TREES
An American translator (Michael Hayden) is sent to Iraq, leaving behind his neurotic homebody of a wife (Natalie Gold) and an extremely precocious son (Gio Perez), both of whom may or may not fall victim to the suspiciously enthusiastic kindness of an elderly neighbor (Maggie Burke). At only twenty-four, the playwright Steven Levenson exhibits some intelligent ambition with this script, but the rather familiar and uncomplicated relationships between the characters and the unjustified tinges of derivative, Sarah Ruhl-esque magical realism lead one to believe he could have used more time honing his craft. The relatively fresh-faced director, Alex Timbers, whose strong suit has always been the loud and spectacular, may not have been the best choice for something so quiet and domestic. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

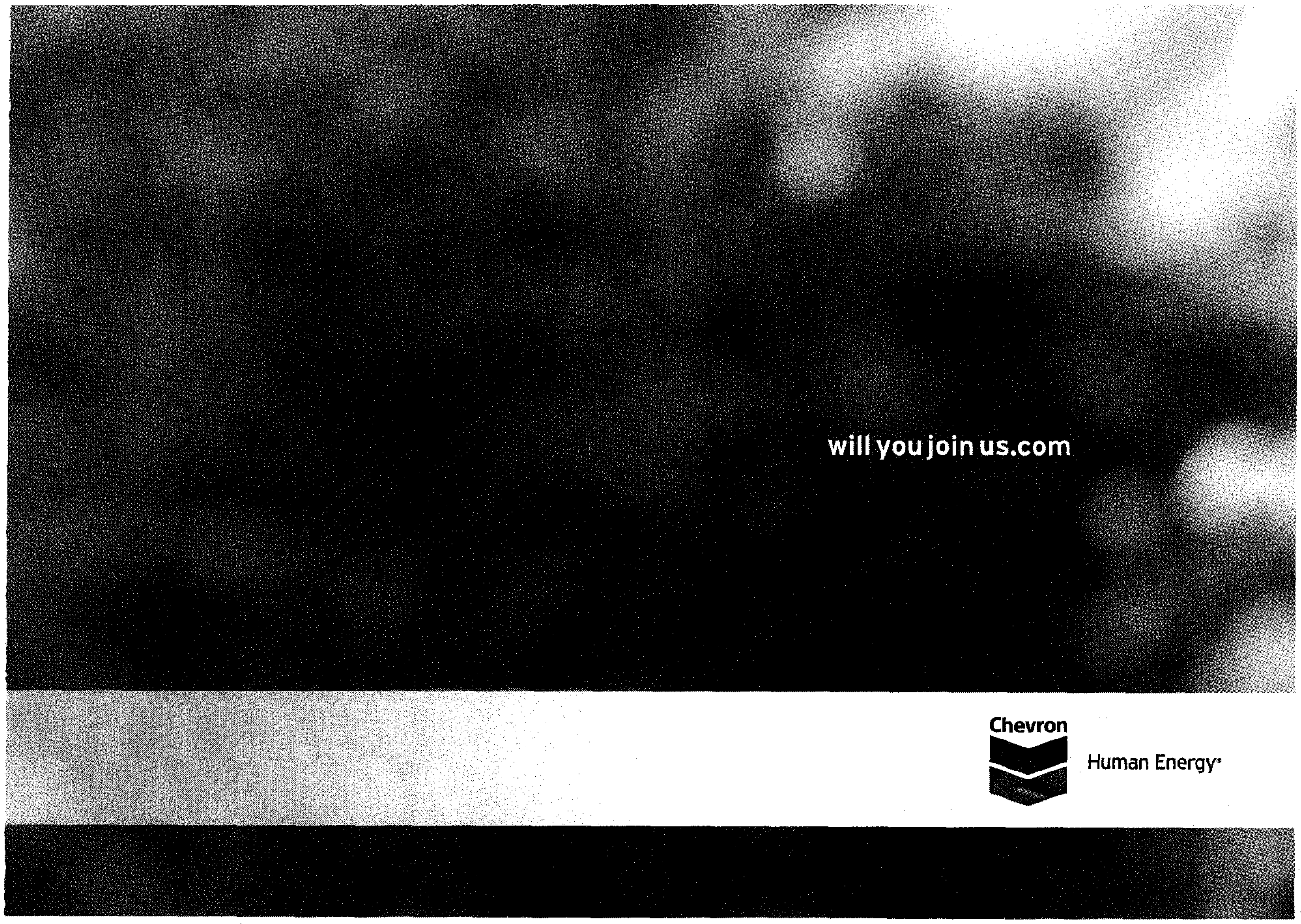
MADE IN POLAND
The Polish Cultural Institute presents a festival of contemporary Polish plays. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE MASTER BUILDER
In what is thought to be Henrik Ibsen's most autobiographical play, from 1892, Halvard Solness (James Naughton) is tortured by his own good fortune; not only did his success as an architect come as a result of a house fire that killed his two infant sons but he's also afraid that he'll lose that same ill-gotten success to the young man working in his studio (Daniel Talbott). A demonic young woman (Charlotte Parry) arrives unexpectedly, reminding the architect of a stolen kiss and a promise made ten years before, when she was only twelve. Ibsen's emotional complexity is rewarding under any circumstances, and this show, adapted by Frank McGuinness and directed by Ciarán O'Reilly, with some excellent performances, is no exception. Still, a lack of chemistry may be one reason why the second act feels not quite fully realized—it hasn't made its way from the head to the heart. (Irish Rep, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

THE OEDIPUS CYCLE
Shepard Sobel directs the world première of Peter Constantine's translation of the Sophocles plays. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

ROMANTIC POETRY
One expects more from the award-winning playwright John Patrick Shanley ("Doubt") and the composer Henry Krieger ("Dreamgirls") than a rudderless farce about not just one but two horny and dim-witted couples who do nothing more than meet, lust after each other, break up when they discover their irreconcilable differences, and then fight, on and off, for the next several years—in song. While Shanley's characters in "Moonstruck" were unsophisticated yet heartfelt, these characters are simply dumb. But what's mostly missing in this play (besides a coherent story line and depth) is poetry. (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SPEED-THE-PLOW
David Mamet's 1988 three-character study is about belief, in the realm of Hollywood's golden idols and



smashed dreams. Bobby Gould (Jeremy Piven, making his Broadway début) is a craven young studio executive who's just been given the power to greenlight any movie with a budget under ten million dollars. As Gould and Charlie Fox (Raúl Esparza), a less successful producer at the same studio, get off on talking about their future glories, they're interrupted by a hapless office temp, Karen (Elisabeth Moss), who ends up at Gould's apartment—partly because Fox bets him five hundred dollars that he can't nail her. Piven is a very good comedic actor, and the subtleties in his performance are transfixing. Both Esparza and Moss are perfect in their parts, but being perfect in their parts requires a certain superficiality. This is not the actors' fault; the roles don't lend themselves to nuance, and the performers are hostages to Mamet's sarcasm, which is sometimes a detriment to the drama. Neil Pepe directs. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/3/08.) (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

SPIN
The StageFARM presents a series of short plays by Adam Rapp, Gina Gionfriddo, Judith Thompson, Elizabeth Meriwether, and Mark Schultz. Alex Kilgore and Evan Cabnet direct. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200. Through Nov. 8.)

Also Playing

ALL MY SONS: Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ARIAS WITH A TWIST:** HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. **THE ATHEIST:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-352-3101. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLACK WATCH:** St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. **BLASTED:** SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **BOYS' LIFE:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **CLAY:** The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Through Nov. 8. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **FIFTY WORDS:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. Through Nov. 8. **THE GLASS CAGE:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. Through Nov. 8. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **IN CONFLICT:** Culture Project, 27 Barrow St. 212-315-0231. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **THE SEAGULL:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **TO BE OR NOT TO BE:** Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **WHAT'S THAT SMELL: THE MUSIC OF JACOB STERLING:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.

The New York Chocolate Show, at Pier 94.

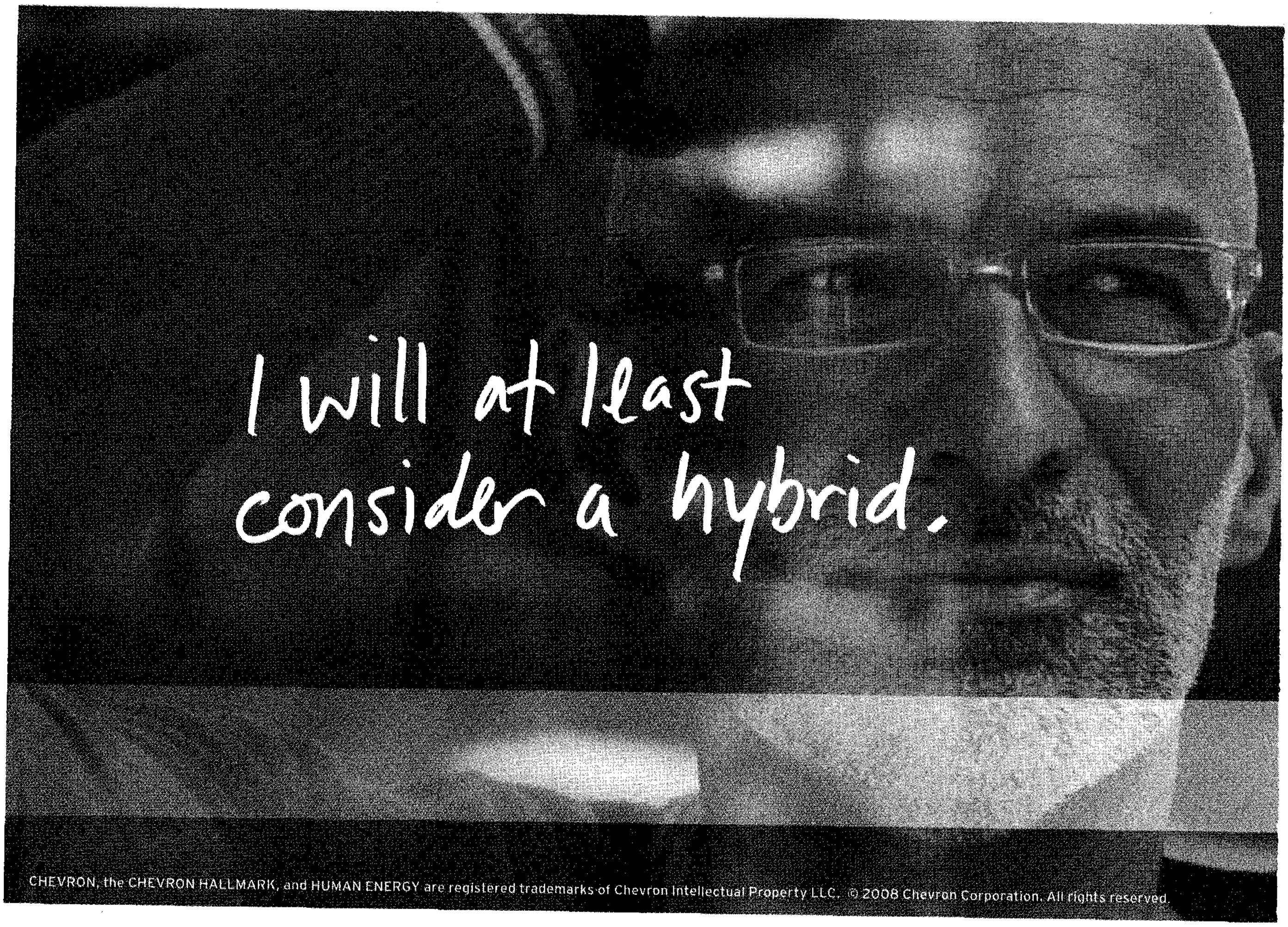
PASCAL BLANCHET

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Nov. 6: The **Bacon Brothers** are the actor Kevin and his brother, Michael. Hollywood hangs like an albatross around the neck of any movie star turned musician, but this duo shakes off the burden of fame with sharply executed rock that has a blue-collar, rootsy edge. Nov. 9: For half a century, **Mavis Staples** has been delivering a potent blend of gospel, blues, soul, and social commentary.

EUROPA NIGHT CLUB
98-104 Meserole Ave., at Manhattan Ave., Greenpoint, Brooklyn (718-383-5723)—Nov. 9: **Psychic TV**, a psychedelic-tinged group led by the British singer and provocateur Genesis


I will at least consider a hybrid.

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P-Orridge, celebrates the release of a trance-inducing new album called "Mr. Alien Brain Vs. the Skinwalkers." P-Orridge's musical career stretches back to mid-seventies London, when he and three mates formed the industrial band Throbbing Gristle, a brutal and groundbreaking ensemble influenced by William S. Burroughs and pornographic imagery. In 1981, P-Orridge put together the more pop-oriented Psychic TV, and they've been active on and off ever since. The new album features passionate rave-ups with densely layered percussion that evoke late-sixties experimental rock like the Velvet Underground and Can, mixed in with a few spacier pieces that highlight P-Orridge's richly textured voice.

GRAND BALLROOM

Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St (212-307-7171)—Nov. 7: **Joe Jackson's** latest album, "Rain," isn't spiky New Wave, but it does showcase his knack for whip-smart songcraft.

LIVING ROOM

154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—Nov. 7 and Fridays through Nov. 21: The imaginative singer-songwriter **Katell Keineg** was born in Wales, raised in Brittany, and has spent a great deal of time in New York City and Dublin (she currently lives in Cardiff). Her voice is beautiful and wild, and it seems to carry in it every mile she has ever travelled.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Nov. 8: As the mainstay of the tirelessly prolific outfit the **Mountain Goats,** John Darnielle has funnelled a penchant for stylistic eclecticism and dense lyrical imagery into an amorphous project that has delighted indie-rock fans. **Kaki King** is an inventive singer-songwriter/guitarist whose unconventional playing style (she strikes the strings of her guitar as if it were a percussive instrument) has gained her critical acclaim. The Mountain Goats and King are currently touring together, and they have a daring new collaboration, a six-song vinyl EP called "Black Pear Tree," which is available only at their shows.

PIANOS

158 Ludlow St. (212-505-3733)—Earlier this year, Andrew Hoepfner, the leader of the underground Brooklyn-based band **Creaky Boards,** suggested in a YouTube video that Coldplay had stolen one of his songs. The highly absurd charge, which the English band denied, concerned a work of Hoepfner's, ironically called "The Songs I Didn't Write," and Coldplay's hit "Viva la Vida." The similarities between the songs are debatable, but the end result is not: Creaky Boards landed, briefly, in the media spotlight. On Nov. 8, Hoepfner and his energetic dance-along five-piece reach for the limelight again, with a show of songs from their second album, "Brooklyn Is Love." The harmonium player **Shilpa Ray,** who sings with a jazzy howl, opens the show with her soulful garage band, **Her Happy Hookers.**

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—Nov. 7: A night of top-shelf singer-songwriters, with **Rosanne Cash** and **Joe Henry.**

SANTOS PARTY HOUSE

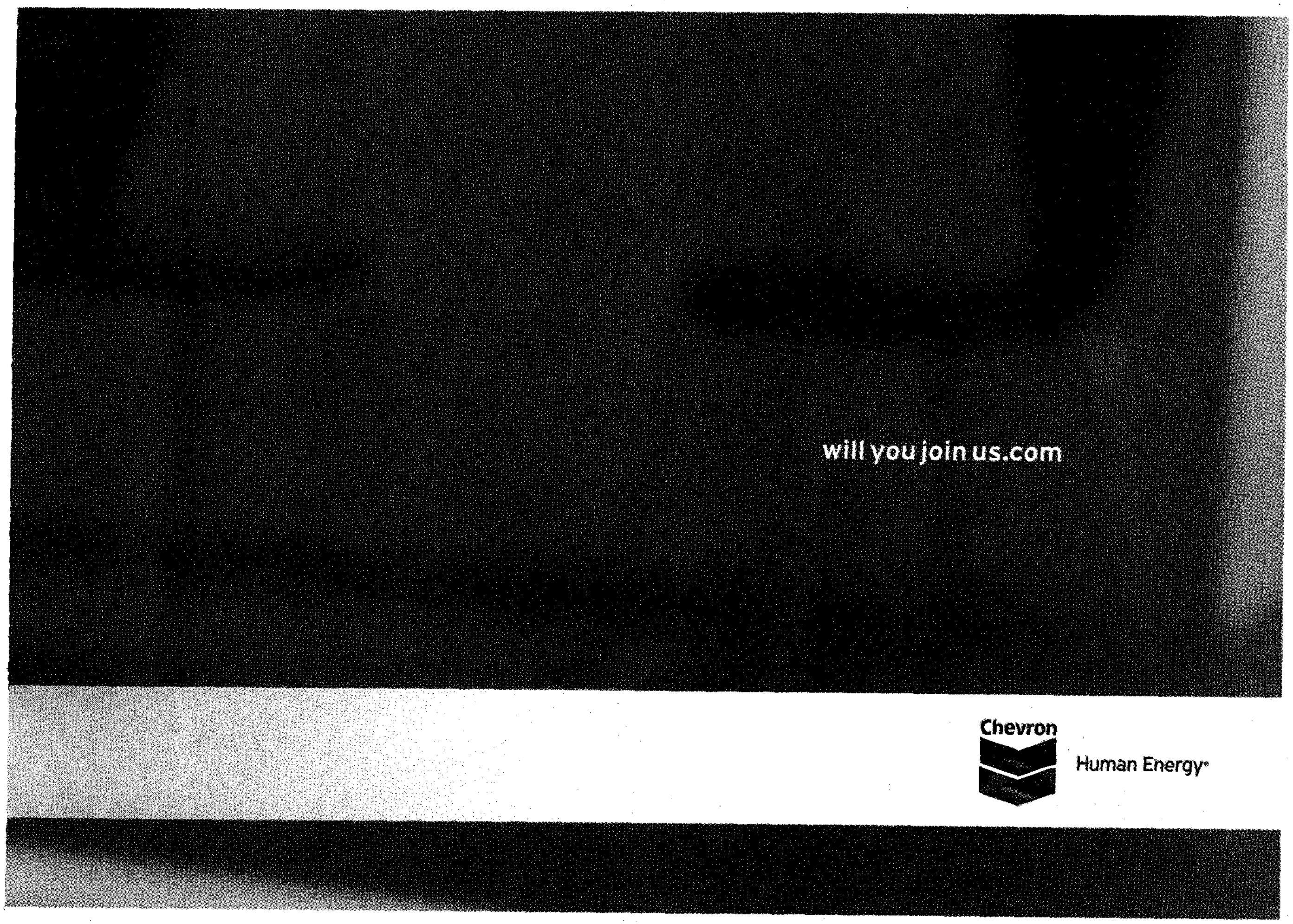
100 Lafayette St. (212-584-5492)—Nov. 6: **Little Annie,** a New York institution whose career has included stints at Max's Kansas City and many an experimental phase, performs songs from "When Good Things Happen to Bad Pianos," her inviting new album of covers recorded with her longtime collaborator, Paul Wallfisch. Made up of pop standards like Frank Sinatra's "It Was a Very Good Year" and Tina Turner's "Private Dancer," the record highlights Little Annie's warm and raspy alto, a voice that sometimes breaks in unexpected and emotional ways. With Wallfisch's elegant piano playing, Annie's slowish tempos, and her concentrated onstage dramatics (she's usually seated), their interpretations have an appealing Brechtian intensity. The languid New York chamber-rock sextet **Edison Woods** opens. Nov. 10: He plays the organ and something called the Drum Buddy—his patented light-activated analog oscillating percussion machine. She plays the maracas, sings backup, and handles the puppets. Together they are **Quintron and Miss Pussycat,** a husband-and-wife performance duo from New Orleans.

TERMINAL 5

610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Nov. 5: The **Decemberists'** captain, Colin Meloy, steers his wordy shipmates to port during the "Bridesmaid Revisited" tour, featuring performances of unreleased tunes, singles, and B sides that never quite coalesced into an album. The show is in support of their new set of releases, "Always the Bridesmaid: A Singles Series." Nov. 6-7: The **Hold Steady,** the pride of Brooklyn, plays brilliant homespun rock and roll that could bring Bruce Springsteen to his knees (in fact, he's a fan). The **Drive-By Truckers** make Southern rock safe for the bookish set. On a double bill, they're inspiring enough to restore one's faith in the power of the backbeat. The two bands are touring together, trading opening slots; the Hold Steady kicks things off on their first night here.

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Nov. 6: The alternative-rock one-hit wonders the **Toadies** are best known for their striking 1995 radio staple, "Possum Kingdom." Nov. 9: The **Mountain Goats** and **Kaki King** (see the Music Hall of Williamsburg).



WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Nov. 8: The Peru native **Eva Ayllón,** one of the world's premier interpreters of Afro-Peruvian soul, is a vocal superstar who has released some twenty albums and who sells out stadiums at home. (Carnegie Hall. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Nov. 7: **John Doe** and **Kathleen Edwards.** Doe first rose to fame as the front man for the Los Angeles punk band X, and he's gone on to a rootsy solo career. He has a knack for portraying unlucky characters, and his tenor is as big as a film-noir Buick. His latest album, "A Year in the Wilderness," includes a duet with Edwards. She's from Ottawa, and she's a child of the Petty, Williams, and Browne (as in Tom, Lucinda, and Jackson) school of confessional songwriting. The economy and poetry of her music call to mind the Canadian masters Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, and Leonard Cohen.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Nov. 8: **Paula West,** an assured singer of durable and offbeat standards whose performances have a lived-in ease that eludes many of the pearly-toothed upstarts now crowding the scene.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 4-9: The **Django Reinhardt NY Festival,** which is in its ninth year at this club, once again brings together European Gypsy jazz virtuosos with local jazzmen. The emphasis this year is on a younger generation of musicians from abroad. The U.S. is represented by the likes of the trombonist **Wycliffe Gordon,** the saxophonist **Joel Frahm,** and the harmonica player **Howard Levy.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 4-9: The bassist **Charlie Haden** has been wearing his left-leaning political convictions on his sleeve since the late sixties; his Liberation Music Orchestra has a fervent repertoire. Expect either triumphant jubilation or righteous indignation from all involved during this run, which starts on Election Night.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Starting Nov. 4: The bighearted, gruff-voiced entertainer **Steve Tyrell** holds court through the end of the year.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Nov. 4-9: The music-festival mogul and part-time pianist **George Wein** has assembled a blue-ribbon band; his Newport All-Stars include the saxophonist **Lew Tabackin,** the trumpeter **Randy Sandke,** and the guitarist **Howard Alden.** Nov. 11: The pianist **Arturo O'Farrill** joins forces with the vocalist **Claudia Acuna** to celebrate the release of their new album, "In These Shoes."

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—The **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra's** latest program is kid stuff; they're turning traditional children's songs into full-fledged swing on Nov. 6-8.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Nov. 5-8: Fifteen years after triumphing at the Thelonious Monk International Piano Competition, **Jacky Terrasson** has settled nicely into his status as a stylish post-bop pianist. His most recent album, "Mirror," was a solo effort; here, he leads one of his tight trios. Nov. 10: The **Mingus Big Band.**

MERKIN CONCERT HALL
129 W. 67th St. (212-501-3330)—Nov. 9: The West Coast-based **Turtle Island String Quartet** reinterprets John Coltrane's landmark 1965 album "A Love Supreme."

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 4-9: Half a century after first turning heads with his alternative vision of jazz, the pianist **Cecil Taylor** is still no average improviser; his determination to remain true to himself is as inspiring to his fans as it is daunting to the uninitiated. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964."** Through Dec. 14. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Royal Porcelain from the Twinight Collection: 1800-1850."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"New York, N. Why?: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt, 1937-1940."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End."** Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927-1937."** Through

I will unplug
stuff more.
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Jan. 12. ♦ **"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night."** Through Jan. 5. ♦ **"Projects 88: Lucy McKenzie."** Through Dec. 1. ♦ **"Kirchner and the Berlin Street."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky."** Through Jan. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Theanyspacewhatever."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Catherine Opie: American Photographer."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video, 1961-2008."** Opens Nov. 7. ♦ **"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Corin Hewitt: Seed Stage."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Signs of the Times."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Gilbert & George."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"The Seduction of Light: Ammi Phillips/Mark Rothko, Compositions in Pink, Green, and Red."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Martin Ramirez: The Last Works."** Through April 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Art and China's Revolution."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Writing the Word of God: Calligraphy and the Qur'an."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Wall Stories: Children's Wallpaper and Books."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Solos: Tulou/Affordable Housing for China."** Through April 5. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze."** Through Jan. 18. ♦ **"Frick's Vermeers Reunited."** Through Nov. 23. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

THE GRADUATE CENTER
365 Fifth Ave., at 34th St. (212-817-7138)—**"People 'Weekly': The Habeas Corpus Lounge."** Through Nov. 6. (Open daily, noon to 11.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Susan Meiselas: In History."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"America and the Tintype."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Cornell Capa: Concerned Photographer."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Living with the Dead: W. Eugene Smith and World War II."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

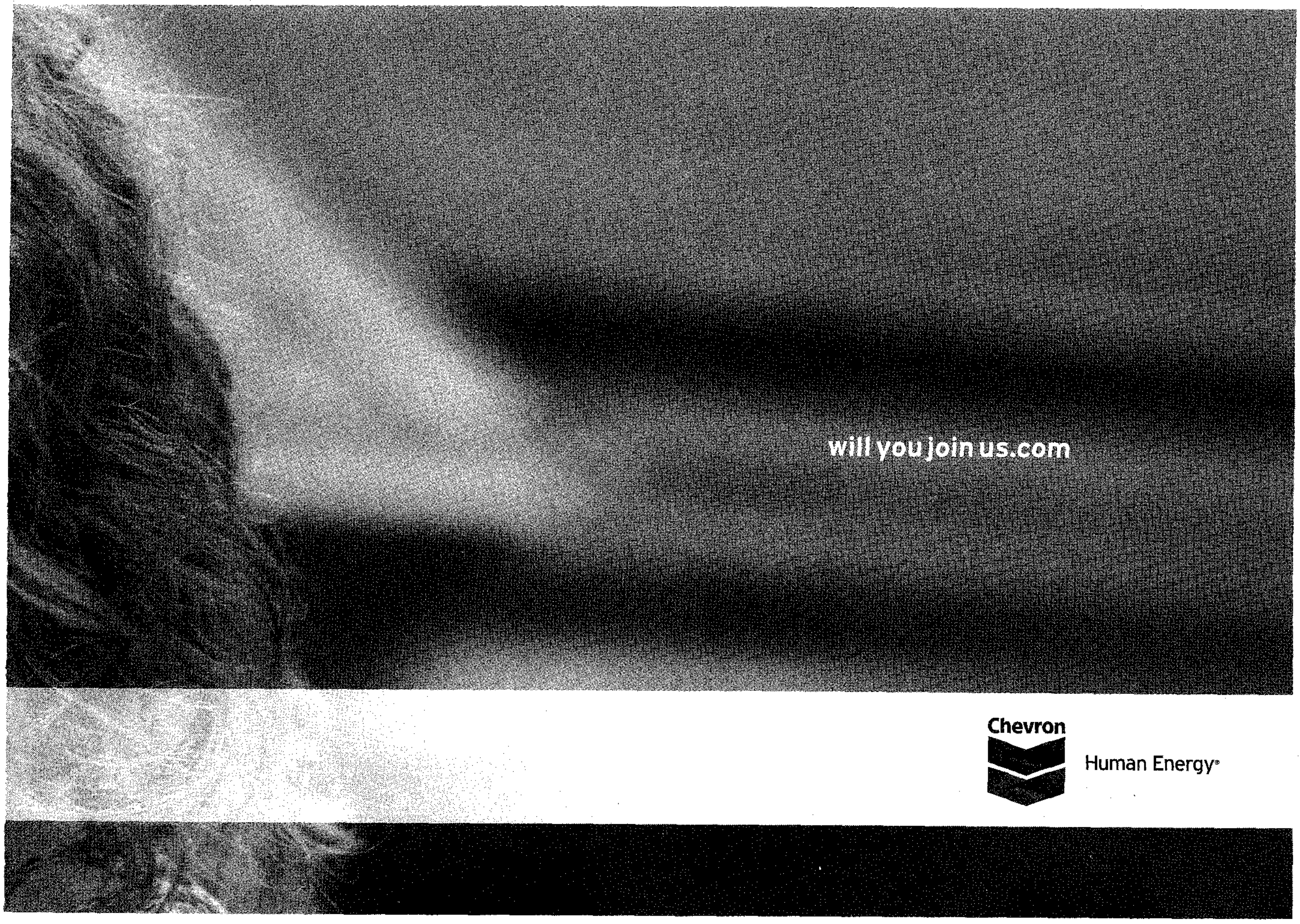
JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"New Bamboo: Contemporary Japanese Masters."** According to the principles of *feng shui*, bamboo wards off bad chi, so the Japan Society is flush with good energy, as twenty-three artists update the centuries-old tradition of plaiting bamboo and rattan, some with the aid of digital tools. Nonutilitarian constructions alternately evoke mathematical models and Shinto forest spirits. Colors range from oxblood to wheat; shapes shift from organic to swooshingly aerodynamic. Open forms engage in shadow play; mysterious vessels close in upon themselves. The overall effect is at once earthy and ethereal. Through Jan. 11. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater, 1919-1949."** Opens Nov. 9. ♦ **"The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Liszt in Paris: Enduring Encounters."** Through Nov. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"George Tooker: A Retrospective"** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Unknown Blakelock."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone."** Through Jan. 26. ♦



"Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton." Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Museum as Hub: Six Degrees."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Drawn by New York: Six Centuries of Watercolors and Drawings."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Grant and Lee in War and Peace."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

PALITZ GALLERY
11 E. 61st St. (212-754-5121)—**"Michelangelo: The Man and the Myth."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 7. To purchase tickets, visit ticketweb.com.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Neohoodoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Gino De Dominicis."** Through Feb. 9. ♦ **"Yael Bartana."** Through Jan. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

FREDERICK H. EVANS
The work of this British photographer (1853-1943), best known as a master of cathedral interiors, comes freighted with a certain Old World mustiness. His pictures of weathered stone steps and the sunlight under vaulted naves will never be chic, but his original platinum prints, many making their U.S. début, are extraordinarily rich and engaging. It helps that they're hung alongside his bucolic English landscapes, including one of a dappled tree trunk in Surrey. Among the surprises: a proto-modernist still-life of a sectioned nautilus shell that anticipates Weston's and a picture of his daughter's baby doll twisted about on a rumpled bed in a way that Hans Bellmer might have appreciated. Through Nov. 14. (Kraus, 962 Park Ave., at 82nd St. 212-794-2064.)

WAYNE F. MILLER
This show of Miller's work from the nineteen-forties coincides with the publication of an excellent monograph on his career as a Magnum photojournalist. Most of these modestly scaled black-and-white photographs were made while Miller served in the Navy; they include shots, taken on and off duty, from the Pacific theatre, as well as images of Hiroshima after the bomb and Naples during the American occupation. Miller, who turned ninety this year, has a great eye for affecting, human moments, which he maximizes through an unerring sense of composition. (Witness his 1945 pictures of crowds at F.D.R.'s funeral.) Every photograph here has a quiet assurance. Through Nov. 15. (Higher Pictures, 764 Madison Ave., at 64th St. 212-249-6100.)

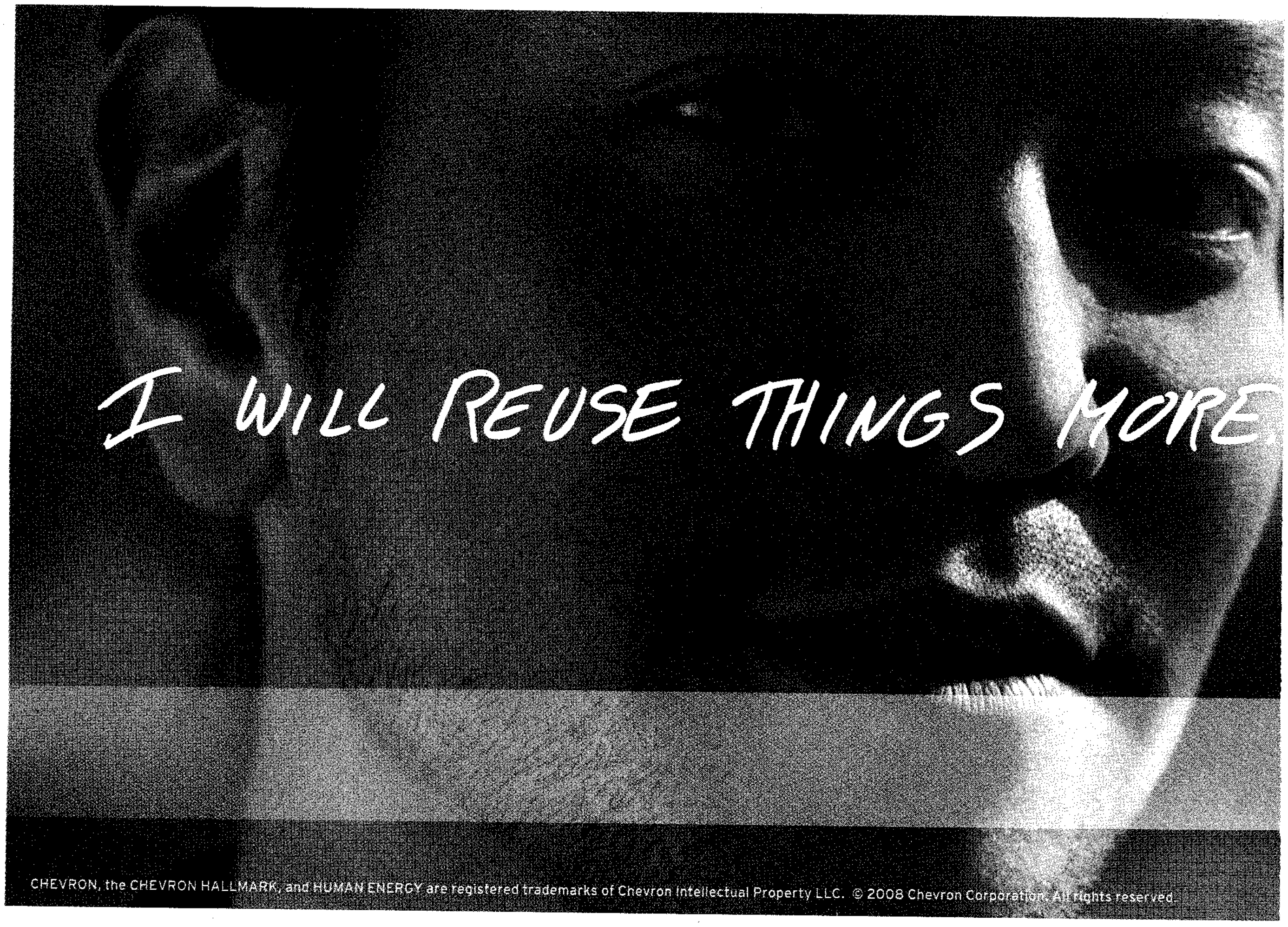
PABLO PICASSO
A small, museum-quality show of portraits made between 1930 and 1932 of Marie-Thérèse Walter, the woman who captivated Picasso as a teen-ager in the mid-nineteen-twenties and was his muse for a decade (Dora Maar supplanted her in the mid-thirties). Picasso is at his most eager to please in these dozen paintings (several on loan from major museums like the Met, the Tate, and MOMA), tenderly rendering his young mistress as a violet-skinned object of desire. Among the works here is the much reproduced "La Rêve," which has been restored after suffering an infamous elbow-related tear two years ago. Augmenting the paintings are a 1931 plaster bust, a couple of drawings, and a roomful of photographs of Marie-Thérèse, Picasso, and their daughter, Maya. Through Nov. 29. (Acquavella, 18 E. 79th St. 212-734-6300.)

Short List

LOTHAR BAUMGARTEN: Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Nov. 20. **HELEN FRANKENTHALER:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Opens Nov. 6. **ALEX KATZ:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Through Nov. 26. **CINDY SHERMAN:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Opens Nov. 8. **LORNA SIMPSON:** Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through Dec. 6. **ADAM VAN DOREN:** Renaissance Studios, 130 W. 57th St. 212-586-8342. Through Dec. 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

BILL HENSON
Earlier this year, in his native Australia, because of a show of big, shadowy photographs of very young adolescents, Henson was threatened with charges of child pornography, which were subsequently dropped. A number of images from that same body of work are here, along with a selection of similar photographs going back to 1998, and one wonders what the fuss was about. Like so many of Henson's subjects, the young girl in his most recent pictures is prepubescent and, even when topless, appears androgynous. She stands alone, in deep shadow, her skin rosy and translucent, like a cross between flesh and alabaster. A group of nighttime landscapes only underline the mood of free-floating dread and ennui. Through Nov. 15. (Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)


I WILL REUSE THINGS MORE.

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CHRIS MCCAW
The title of McCaw's "Sunburn Series" is entirely literal. Setting his camera up for long exposures in the Mojave Desert or by San Francisco Bay, he lets his open lens work as a magnifying glass to focus the sun's light on paper negatives. The photographs that result, each unique, are dark, day-for-night images in which the path of the sun is recorded as a gouge or a curved incision. The series recalls Marco Breuer's scorched and abraded work on photographic paper and the slashed canvases of Lucio Fontana, but McCaw's burns are grounded in landscape, and they're as fascinating as meteors streaking across the sky. Through Dec. 6. (Mazzeo, 526 W. 26th St. 212-741-6599.)

KEITH MAYERSON
The stately portrait of Barack Obama at the gallery's entrance is a hopeful pendant to the show's bombastic conclusion: four canvases depicting the World Trade Center on September 11th, the terrifying imagery offset by lyrically impressionistic brushstrokes. (The subject of painting rivals geopolitics as the show's keystone.) Between these two poles lies a shifting realm of faith, culture, and the natural world. There are portraits of Anne Frank, the Marx Brothers, and Louise Bourgeois; a quasi-abstraction of a pale leopard camouflaged by snow; and a naked Christ, painted after an image by Michelangelo. There's a treat tucked into a theatrical view of the Dalai Lama onstage at Radio City: its red walls and yellow orbs of light bear a striking resemblance to those in van Gogh's "Night Café." Through Nov. 5. (Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411.)

MARIO MERZ
Gladstone inaugurates its second Chelsea gallery with a museum-quality installation of three works by the Arte Povera artist, who died in 2003. Outside, along the gallery's roofline, the first ten numbers of the Fibonacci sequence (a series beloved by Merz) are traced in red neon. Inside, there are two very big sculptures made of nesting metal igloo forms, their walls partially filled in with branches, stone, and glass. Circumnavigate one to read (in Italian) "The house turns around us or we turn around the house"; the other is topped by an aluminum deer with "10,946" (the twenty-first Fibonacci number) emblazoned on its side. Merz's is a language that, like semaphore, can seem inscrutable to the uninitiated but nonetheless offers up visual pleasures and conceptual provocations. Through Dec. 30. (530 W. 21st St. 212-206-9300.)

ERNESTO NETO
The Brazilian artist's interactive environments tend to come with instructions. In previous shows, visitors have had to don booties or remove their shoes before crawling into padded playrooms. Here, a tunnel with plywood sections covered in stretchy nylon (it looks like a giant centipede) offers a less than immersive lesson in the merging of viewer and sculpture. Upstairs, one can touch the abstract wooden forms—but not the surrounding fixtures. Neto may be a budding master of neo-surrealist biomorphic form, but he doesn't achieve the level of art and audience integration that his gallery-mate Charles Long did more than ten years ago, in his "Amorphous Body Study Center." Through Nov. 15. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

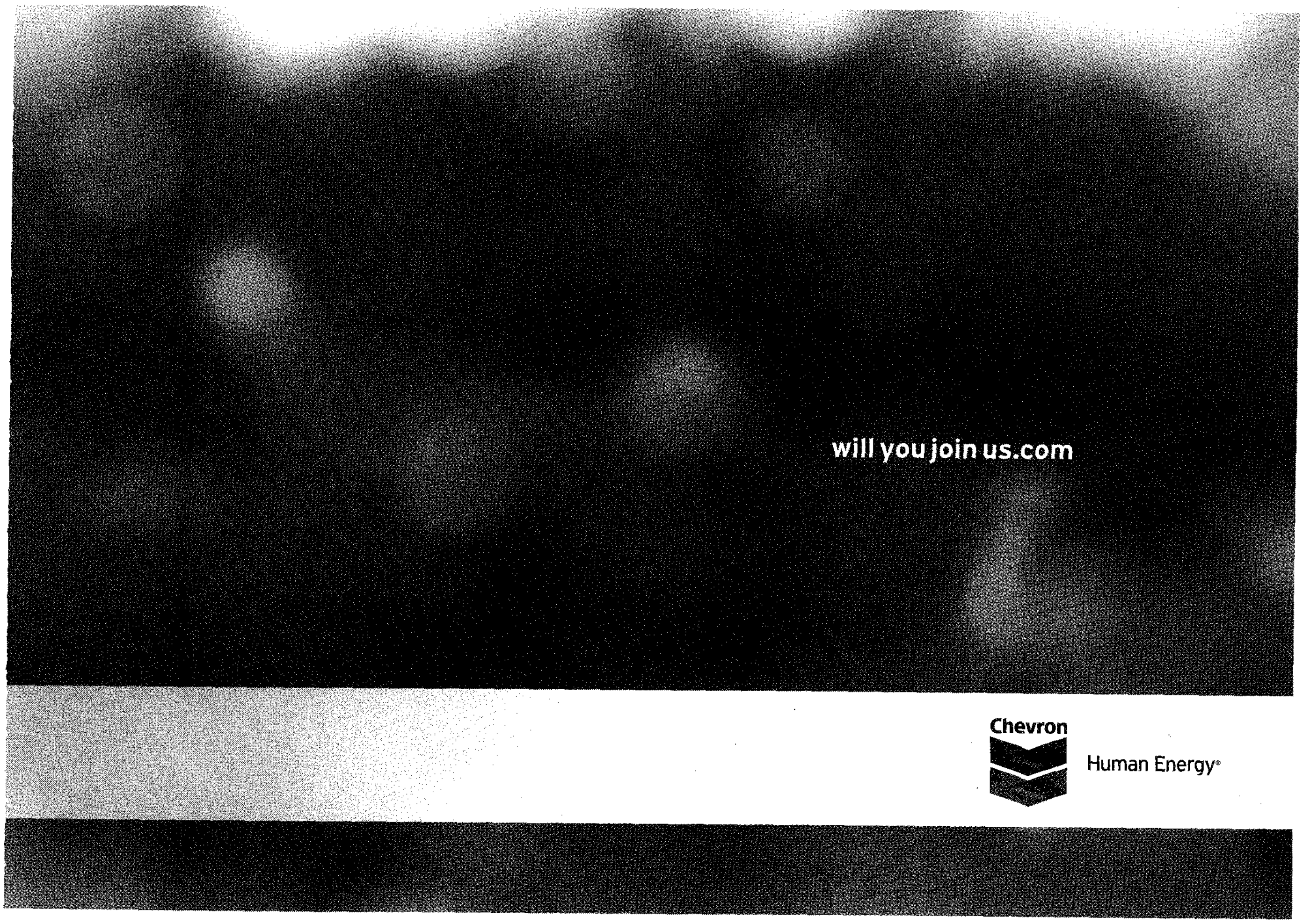
RACHEL OWENS
There's an undeniable sweetness to Owens's work, even when she tackles earnestly political subjects. In the sculptures here, glass from broken bottles forms crutches, translucent garlands of leaves, and delicate, spindly limbs. A film of the artist at sixteen interviewing Desmond Tutu about religious convictions and evil is projected into a rusty barrel lined with rubble and more broken glass. Collages of grief-stricken people, many of them soldiers, reveal that the woman has not lost the teen-ager's sympathy—or her passion for justice. Through Nov. 8. (ZieherSmith, 533 W. 25th St. 212-229-1088.)

Short List

STAN DOUGLAS: Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Dec. 23. **JUDITH EISLER:** Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-8710. Through Nov. 15. **ANDREAS GURSKY:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Opens Nov. 6. **GEORGE HERMS:** Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111. Through Nov. 15. **SEAN LANDERS:** Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Nov. 15. **KEITH MAYERSON:** Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411. Through Nov. 15. **MATTHEW MONAHAN:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Nov. 15. **LARI PITTMAN:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Nov. 29. **TERRY WINTERS:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Opens Nov. 5. **STEPHEN WESTFALL:** Lennon Weinberg, 514 W. 24th St. 212-941-0012. Through Dec. 20.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

STEF DRIESEN
Driesen's paintings look eerily familiar—like talismans of the uncanny. There are echoes of Driesen's fellow-Belgian Luc Tuymans in the chalky mauve-and-taupe palette and of Yves Tanguy's Surrealist dreamscapes. The oddball Old Masters Joos de Momper and Giuseppe Arcimboldo are also invoked, as is the godfather of Belgian art—and the master of painterly enigma—Magritte. But Driesen's paintings, which merge abstraction with representation and landscape with figuration, wear the cloak of



history lightly. Despite all their precedents, his work looks surprisingly fresh. Through Nov. 8. (Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290.)

LEON GOLUB
Being an activist was as central to the late artist's identity as painting. The works here, from the mid-eighties and early nineties, are less incendiary than those he made depicting police brutality and other acts of violence. But a current of unrest simmers throughout, with race as a central theme. Drawings and raw-looking canvases, hung like posters from nails in the walls, depict people, black and white, eying each other mistrustfully. Lone figures wear menacing scowls. One man sports a T-shirt—its words unprintable here—telling Japan where to go. The sentiment is dated, of course: America has new enemies and competitors. But it highlights, with regrettable pertinence, the absurdity of hate-based politics. Through Nov. 15. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232.)

Short List

AUGUSTO ARBIZO: Envoy, 131 Chrystie St. 212-226-4555. Through Dec. 14. **NICOLE CHERUBINI:** Smith-Stewart, 53 Stanton St. 212-477-2821. Through Nov. 16. **JONATHAN HOROWITZ:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Nov. 15. **CLIFFORD OWENS:** On Stellar Rays, 133 Orchard St. 212-598-3012. Through Dec. 14. **LORNA SIMPSON:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through Dec. 13.

DANCE

GARTH FAGAN DANCE
At the Joyce, the man from Rochester presents two different programs that mostly sample from recent repertory. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 4-5 at 7:30, Nov. 6-7 at 8, Nov. 8 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 9 at 2 and 7:30.)

LAR LUBOVITCH DANCE COMPANY
Except for a brief hiatus early on, Lubovitch's troupe has now been around for forty years. At City Center, two anniversary programs reach back for the curious "Whirligogs" (1969) and the Philip Glass trance dance "North Star" (1978), but they center on Lubovitch's signature Mozart pastoral, "Concerto Six Twenty-Two" (1986), with its justly celebrated male duet, and on recent work in a similar vein, such as "Jangle," a première to Bartók rhapsodies. These are in the mode—unfailingly handsome, shapely, and lushly conventional—that has long sent reviewers reaching for water imagery (fluent, swirling, eddying, a warm bath) while they try to account for why beauty and craft aren't always enough. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Nov. 5 at 7 and Nov. 6-8 at 8.)

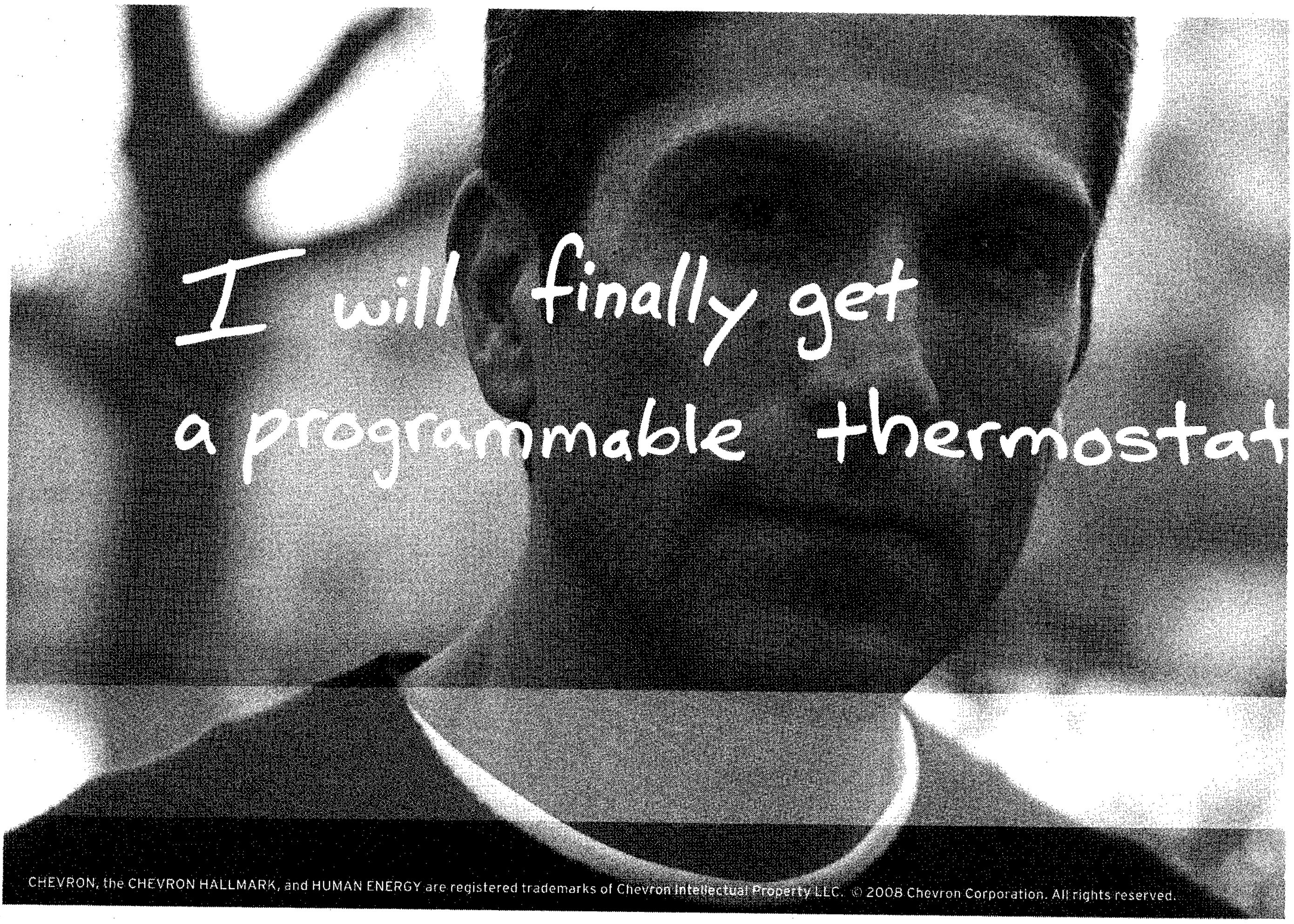
"LES SEPT PLANCHES DE LA RUSE" / COMPAGNIE 111
The French choreographer and director Aurélien Bory's work is described as "*nouveau cirque*," a genre that combines physical theatre, poetic imagery, acrobatics, and dance. The work's most effective element is a platform cut into a tangram, whose seven pieces are manipulated in myriad ways by fourteen cat-like Chinese dancers and acrobats, all trained in the Peking Opera style. The surprising transformations alter one's perception of space and movement, creating beautiful landscapes, at times swallowing dancers whole. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. Nov. 5 and Nov. 7-8 at 7:30.)

LATIN AMERICAN CULTURAL WEEK
This festival includes shows by New Generation Dance Company (see below), the all-female ensemble GlamourTango, from Uruguay and Argentina, and DANMAR, a Texas-based company specializing in dance styles from Latin America. For a complete schedule, visit www.pamar.org. (Multiple venues. 212-688-6862. Nov. 5-20.)

ELLIS WOOD DANCE
In recent years, Wood has profitably concentrated on feminine power, addressing ideas about gender without letting those conceptions get in the way of visceral dancing. Her new "Falcon Project" is the culmination of workshops in which she invited members of Manhattan's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center to express their gender identity through movement. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. Nov. 6-8 at 8.)

PARALLEL EXIT
Among the many things this physical-comedy troupe resurrects is the connection between a tap dancer's timing and a comic's. Their clever and genuinely funny work draws inspiration from such great dancers as Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, pulling out gags that have been packed away in the proverbial trunk for so long that they're fresh again. "Time Step" applies their slapstick, low-tech stage magic to the story of three hoofers. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Nov. 6-8 at 8 and Nov. 9 at 3.)

KIMBERLY BARTOSIK
For "Ecsteriority1&2," Bartosik and the designer Roderick Murray drape St. Mark's Church in black. The first section of the piece situates the audience in a "V" shape around Marc Mann and Elke Rindfleisch, as the pair execute a raw, close-quarters duet. In the second part, viewers move to the sides of the space to watch Derry Swan and the ever-compelling Wally Cardona keep each other at a distance, periodically freezing in uncomfortable positions. White taxidermy mod-



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MOTOR
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"Soul Men," a comedy, opens Nov. 7.

MICHAEL WELDON

els of coyotes, both whole and just heads in a pile, add to the postapocalyptic air. (Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Nov. 6-8 at 8:30.)

"VOLVER AL SUR" / NEW GENERATION DANCE COMPANY

Dardo Galletto's elegant little company returns to Symphony Space. Galletto, who began his career with Julio Bocca's Ballet Argentino, creates neat shows that manage to avoid most of the clichés of stage tango while incorporating other techniques, mainly ballet. This year, his fine group of dancers is joined by the fabulous *tangueras* Guillermina Quiroga and Natalia Hills. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Nov. 7 at 8 and Nov. 8 at 3 and 8.)

KOTA YAMAZAKI/FLUID HUG-HUG

Inspired both by the yellow blossoms of the New Mexico desert and van Gogh's sunflowers, Yamazaki's "Chamissa 4°C" is atmospheric and abnormal. Five dancers, illuminated only by reflected light, move in the choreographer's crazy-quilt international style but flavor the dancing with quirky tics and mumbled phrases in English, Japanese, and gibberish. Grunts, giggles, and screams interpenetrate the detail-rich and seemingly random activity. (Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. Nov. 7 at 8:30, Nov. 8 at 3 and 8:30, and Nov. 9 at 3.)

INBAL PINTO DANCE COMPANY

Inbal Pinto's works conjure a distinct surrealistic, droll world, seemingly pregnant with meaning. In "Shaker" (made with the company's co-director, Avshalom Pollak), she takes us inside a snow globe, where relationships are mysteriously transformed, creating an air of enchantment, but also of fear and danger. (Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 11 at 7:30. Through Nov. 16.)

BEBE MILLER COMPANY

"Necessary Beauty" takes place in front of two large screens onto which are projected some obviously beautiful, high-resolution images (nature scenes, portraits of the dancers). The all-female cast executes a series of largely understated movements, dancing for each other or staring down the audience, engaging its attention or not. From the sound score emerge fragments of conversations, mostly memories about clothing and interior design. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 11 at 7:30. Through Nov. 15.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

The Met presents the New York première of John Adams's **"Doctor Atomic,"** an opera that gives a lyrical tone and a mythic dimension to the invention of the atomic bomb, at Los Alamos at the end of the Second World War. The superb Gerald Finley and Eric Owens take on the roles of J. Robert Oppenheimer and his nemesis, General Leslie Groves; Sasha Cooke sings the role of Kitty Oppenheimer; Alan Gilbert conducts. (Nov. 5 at 8 and Nov. 8 at 1.) ♦ In a very respectable revival of **"La Traviata,"** Anja Harteros and Massimo Giordano—the doomed "lost woman" and her ardent swain—sing handsomely against Franco Zeffirelli's backdrop of gold leaf, French country-house pastels, and glittery excess; the director, Kristine McIntyre, coaxes what drama she can from a production that resists storytelling. With Željko Lučić as Germont; the conductor, Paolo Carignani, leads his singers with a sympathy that avoids self-indulgence. (Nov. 6 at 8.) ♦ Perched perilously on the border between opera and oratorio, **"La Damnation de Faust,"** Berlioz's thrilling "dramatic legend," has long been a temptation for directors. Robert Lepage, one of the opera world's more innovative ones, takes it on at the Met in a new multimedia production that features Susan Graham, Marcello Giordani, and John Relyea singing the roles of Marguerite, Faust, and Méphistophélès; James Levine is on the podium. (Nov. 7 and Nov. 10 at 8.) ♦ **"Madama Butterfly,"** with the excellent Patricia Racette (in the title role), Maria Zifchak, Roberto Aronica, and Dwayne Croft; Patrick Summers. (Nov. 8 at 8:30 and Nov. 11 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

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BAM OPERA: "ARJUNA'S DILEMMA"
Douglas J. Cuomo, the composer made famous by his spicy theme for "Sex and the City," is a serious professional with interests that range across classical, jazz, and world music. He brings them all to bear on his most ambitious project, a chamber opera inspired by an episode from the Bhagavad Gita. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Nov. 5 and Nov. 7-8 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Both the pianist Lang Lang and the conductor (and pianist) Christoph Eschenbach have virtuoso technique, but they're not ones to let intellectual analysis get in the way of impassioned performances. They come together at Avery Fisher Hall to offer works by two Germanic titans, Beethoven (the Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major) and Bruckner (the Symphony No. 9 in D Minor). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Nov. 5-6 at 7:30, Nov. 7 at 2, and Nov. 8 at 8.)

"SACRED MUSIC IN A SACRED SPACE": "PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE"
Conceived as a kind of grand chamber Mass, Rossini's last masterpiece is an anomaly, a setting of the liturgy that marries florid bel-canto melodism to reverently Bachian choral writing. Kent Tritle leads the Chorus and Orchestra of the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in a performance of the composer's second version, for standard orchestra. (Park Ave. at 84th St. 212-288-2520. Nov. 5 at 8.)

KIROV ORCHESTRA: "RUSSIAN DREAMS"
Valery Gergiev, the world's favorite Russian conductor, is in charge of Lincoln Center's extensive new series dedicated to the music of Sergei Prokofiev; the first two concerts are devoted to one of the composer's great strengths, the ballet. Nov. 9 at 3: The well-known "Scythian Suite" and selections from the beloved "Cinderella" are interspersed with suites from two more exotic works, "The Tale of the Buffoon" and the "The Steel Step," a Constructivist caprice. ♦ Nov. 10 at 8: The sweeping "Romeo and Juliet," complete. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500.)

RECITALS

MUSIC BY DAVID LANG
With his winning of the Pulitzer Prize for "The Little Match Girl Passion" (one of the most original and moving scores of recent years), Lang, once a postminimalist enfant terrible, has solidified his standing as an American master. A group of impressive performers—featuring the piano-cello-percussion trio Real Quiet and the vocalist Theo Bleckmann—offer a slate of works (including the newly recorded "Pierced") at (Le) Poisson Rouge. (158 Bleecker St. www.lepoissonrouge.com. Nov. 5 at 7:30.)

MILLER THEATRE: THE COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS OF MILTON BABBITT
The Zukofsky Quartet, a superb young group experienced in modern and classic repertory, heroically performs all five of the formidable quartets composed by one of music's modernist icons. Babbitt will speak about his music onstage with James Levine. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Nov. 5 at 8.)

MMARTISTS IN CONCERT
The Metropolitan Museum's resident ensemble of sterling young musicians offers a typically piquant mix of masterpieces old and new (including Beethoven's gallivanting Septet and Takemitsu's "Rocking Mirror Daybreak"); the performers include the clarinettist Todd Palmer and the violinist Jennifer Frautschi. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Nov. 7 at 8.)

TETZLAFF QUARTET
Christian Tetzlaff—one of the most penetrating artists of his generation—has been highly visible as a violin virtuoso over the last decade, but he's also becoming known for leading the string quartet that bears his name. The group comes to Zankel Hall to perform quartets by Mozart, Berg (the "Lyric Suite"), and Sibelius. (212-247-7800. Nov. 8 at 7:30.)

"MUSIC IN EXILE: ÉMIGRÉ COMPOSERS OF THE 1930'S"
Musicians from the Royal Conservatory in Toronto are at the heart of this four-concert series presented at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, devoted to the work of the notable refugee composers who fled Central Europe before the Second World War. The first program features chamber music by Walter Braunfels and Adolf Busch (Rudolf Serkin's father-in-law). (36 Battery Pl. 646-437-4202. Nov. 9 at 2:30. For complete listing of concerts and talks, see www.mjhnyc.org.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
The conductor James Levine, as busy as ever, always has time for the composers he loves. Two works by Pierre Boulez (including "Dérive") lead off his latest program, which also features works by Schoenberg (the chamber version of the Five Pieces for Orchestra), Schumann, and Mozart; the soprano Judith Bettina, among other guest artists, assists. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 9 at 5.)

NINE CIRCLES CHAMBER THEATRE
This series, headed by the violinist Gil Morgenstern, puts new and classic works into unexpected cultural contexts. His latest recital, with the pianist Donald Berman, features not only music by Beethoven, Gershwin, Cage, and John Harbison but also readings of texts (by the actor Bill Camp) ranging from the diaries of Casanova to the table

I will commute more with others.

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talk of Isaiah Berlin. (Rubin Museum of Art, 150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000, ext. 344. Nov. 9 at 6.)

JEREMY DENK
The young pianist, for years one of New York's most invaluable musicians, seems on the brink of something big. He makes his Zankel Hall recital début with two of the most challenging sonatas in the repertory: Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" and Ives's "Concord." (212-247-7800. Nov. 11 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS
Mark Herman directed this Second World War drama, about the friendship of two boys at a concentration camp, one a Jewish prisoner and the other the son of the commandant. Opening Nov. 7. (Cinemas 1, 2, and 3.)

GARDENS OF THE NIGHT
Damian Harris directed this drama, about two teens on the streets of San Diego. Opening Nov. 7. (Village East Cinemas.)

JCVD
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Nov. 7. (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA
An animated comedy, about four animals who escape from a New York zoo. Directed by Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath; with the voices of Ben Stiller, Chris Rock, David Schwimmer, and Jada Pinkett Smith. Opening Nov. 7. (In wide release.)

PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL
Virginia Reticker directed this documentary, about a group of Liberian women who worked to elect Africa's first female head of state. Opening Nov. 7. (Cinema Village.)

REPO: THE GENETIC OPERA
A postapocalyptic musical, about a biotech company that offers elective organ transplants. Directed by Darren Lynn Bousman and starring Alexa Vega. Opening Nov. 7. (In wide release.)

ROLE MODELS
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Nov. 7. (In wide release.)

SOUL MEN
Samuel L. Jackson and Bernie Mac star as estranged soul-music singers who reunite at a performance at the Apollo Theatre. Directed by Malcolm D. Lee. Opening Nov. 7. (In wide release.)

STAGES
A drama, directed by Mijke de Jong, about a couple's failed marriage. In Dutch. Opening Nov. 5. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

BODY OF LIES
This shrewd and tightly drawn anti-terror thriller, directed by Ridley Scott, suggests that the C.I.A. has all the technical advantages but not enough of the human intelligence needed to combat Mideast terrorism. The field agent Roger Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio) is just about the best there is, but his efforts on the ground are often confounded by a higher-up, Hoffman (Russell Crowe), who manages him via cell phone and laptop from the Washington suburbs. Hoffman, an American consumer of advanced technology and vast amounts of food, is too impatient; in the end, he's dependent on help from the brilliant but secretive head of Jordanian intelligence (the English actor Mark Strong, in a witty performance). The movie has the usual tropes of the genre—surveillance shots from drones, S.U.V.s tearing across the desert, explosions, scenes of torture—but Scott manages the space and timing better than most thriller directors.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/13/08.) (In wide release.)

CHANGELING
Angelina Jolie stays perfectly in character (too perfectly—her performance is dull) as Christine Collins, a single mother and telephone-company supervisor in 1928 Los Angeles whose nine-year-old son is kidnapped and who then has to suffer the absurd humiliation of the L.A.P.D.'s trying to force her to accept a look-alike as a substitute. Clint Eastwood directed with extraordinary control—the mood and tone and lighting are precisely matched from one scene to the next. But the movie is dutiful rather than exciting: it's an austerely made feminist protest drama, in which the police and their various stooges condescend to Christine as a woman and therefore as someone of weak understanding. There's also a creepy subplot about a mass murderer in the desert, one of whose victims may be the missing boy, but, in the end, the movie congratulates us for indignant feelings that we already have. With John Malkovich as an impersonally benevolent Presbyterian minister who helps Christine.—*D.D.* (10/27/08) (In wide release.)

THE DUCHESS
A slice from the life of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (Keira Knightley), who, we are told, cut a swath through English high society in the second half of the eighteenth century. The swath, as represented in Saul Dibb's film, seems less than formidable; the heroine's political acumen is displayed early on, in repartee at dinner, but then left largely to wilt, and her most memorable social appearance is a drunken stagger, during which her hedge-size wig catches fire. Ralph Fiennes plays her husband in a clever and, one suspects, accurate portrayal of a chilly pragmatist bent on producing an heir. If there is dull-

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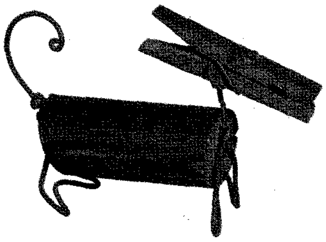
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
EXTENDED PLAY

The jam-packed "Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933," currently at the Whitney, is fun, but not lots of fun. That's no surprise. Calder's early career as a darling of smart-set expatriates and eagerly condescending French Americanists in Jazz Age Paris has long since yellowed and cracked. (Does any self-respecting twenty-first-century child, of any age, genuinely enjoy the parlor whimsies of Calder's "Circus," with its awful confidence of being irresistible?) But the show ends up strong, and this jolts. What Calder brought to Paris, such as a winning knack for caricature in wire sculpture, is one thing. What he took away—a brilliantly inventive stylistic synthesis derived from Picasso, Miró, Mondrian, and the Surrealists—is quite another. The exhibition's teeming array of objects, pictures, and projected films shifts into overdrive midway, pivoting on a visit to Mondrian's studio in 1930 that alerted Calder to the possibilities of abstraction. His penchant for strenuous insouciance became a genius for playful toil, investing modern forms with timeless dramas—implied when not actual—of gravity and motion.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*



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ness at the heart of the film, that may be due less to the director (though he should have cut it by a good ten minutes) than to the source material; attempts to link Georgiana's story with a broken royal marriage of more recent vintage are tendentious at best. The most diverting character is Lady Elizabeth Foster (Hayley Atwell), the Duke's mistress, who moved in to create a ménage à trois, and who should have been the heroine of this movie. Atwell is bewitching enough to have held it in her spell.—*Anthony Lane* (In wide release.)

EAGLE EYE

A sloppy but entertaining technology-gone-wild thriller, about a slacker (Shia LaBeouf) who teams up with a threatened mom (Michelle Monaghan) when they receive sinister instructions from a disembodied voice. The film, directed by D. J. Caruso, is packed with action sequences that recall hits of the past (such as "North by Northwest" and "Enemy of the State") and which are so swiftly and energetically staged that their familiarity is almost welcome. The twists and turns of the plot—whom the two protagonists are running from, what they're doing—are more manufactured than written, but Caruso and the host of screenwriters craft the film's theme of paranoid surveillance for speed, not plausibility. They fail to say anything Orwellian about the times we live in; the hectic overplotting is so consumer-driven that it nearly devours itself.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

FILTH AND WISDOM

Exciting news for those who never tire of Madonna's self-transformations: here is yet another change of tack. For her latest trick, she has become a film director, or has, at any rate, made faltering steps in that direction. The hero of her tale, Andriy, is played by Eugene Hutz, the explosively hairy front man of a band called Gogol Bordello. (That name itself has more rough poetry than anything in the movie.) Andriy shares an apartment in London with Holly (Holly Weston), a dancer, and Juliette (Vicky McClure), an ordinary kleptomaniac pharmaceutical assistant. Also thrown into the mix is Juliette's heartsick employer (Inder Manocha) and, horror of horrors, a blind and lachrymose poet (Richard E. Grant). Madonna scholars will be unsurprised to learn that sexual conduct is limited to the sadomasochistic. Somewhere in this stew of stories is an attempt to savor the many ingredients of a modern multicultural city, as well as an old-style injunction to follow your dream, but neither is discernible for long, owing to the ham-fisted nature of the filmmaking. Lighting, script, and performances seem unreleasably poor, and there is a shameful dabbling in ethnic stereotypes; the one proud virtue of the enterprise, in fact, is a running time of little more than eighty minutes.—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY

Poppy (Sally Hawkins), the single, thirty-year-old London schoolteacher in Mike Leigh's comedy, bounces on a trampoline after school, but she doesn't need much of a lift—she's already airborne. Is possession of the happiness gene enough to get you through life without harm? Or, putting it less grandly, can a woman as cheerful as Poppy serve as the protagonist of a full-length movie? Leigh, who directs with a carefree assurance (after much rehearsal with the actors), matches his heroine against a series of adversaries—an iron-willed flamenco dancer, a bully boy in her class, a driving instructor (Eddie Marsan) who is so rule-bound that he's choking with rage—all of whom try to overcome unhappiness by behaving aggressively or living as rigidly as possible. The movie is not an argument for chaos; it's an argument for making one's way through life with a relaxed will and an open heart.—*D.D.* (10/13/08) (In wide release.)

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 3: SENIOR YEAR

For the first time, the goings on at East High, that noted hotbed of voluptuous tension and intellectual clout, are visible on the big screen. Until now, the franchise has stayed within the bounds of the Disney Channel, and this third installment, directed by Kenny Ortega, cleaves to established guidelines. The young scholars still carry books around, for instance, in preference to reading them. Troy (Zac Efron) still loves Gabriella (Vanessa Hudgens) with a passion so unbridled that they are allowed to sit side by side on a hammock. He even invites her up into his tree house. But prom night beckons, as does the prospect of college, not to mention the end-of-year dramatic production: a chance for Chad (Corbin Bleu), Sharpay (Ashley Tisdale), Kelsi (Olesya Rulin), and the other regulars to parade their extravagant gifts. Though the plot feels weirdly scrappy and casual, there is a pleasing generosity to the way in which Ortega crams in as many songs as possible, often on the flimsiest of pretexts; if one tune slips from your memory before the next arrives, that's part of the deal. Much less forgettable is Ryan (Lucas Grabeel), the school choreographer, who dreams of Juilliard and dresses like a Nazi golfer.—*A.L.* (11/3/08) (In wide release.)

I'VE LOVED YOU SO LONG

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

JCVD

Jean-Claude Van Damme, the "Muscles from Brussels," returns to his home town and gets caught up in a "Dog Day Afternoon"-type robbery in the director Mabrouk El Mechri's meta-movie mash-up. Van Damme, playing himself (his best role), stumbles into a heist while seeking a loan—he's broke, his career is a bust, and he needs to pay the lawyers who represented him in a custody fight. When he's mistaken for the brains behind the robbery, the film becomes a neat balancing act between the reality of Van Damme's life and a cops-and-robbers hostage drama. El Mechri's skilled direction—which lends humor to the shifting time frames and different points of view—has a slick documentary feel to it, and the biographical approach to the star (touching on Van Damme's past flops, his custody battle, drug use, womanizing, etc.) blends winningly with the action plot to produce an insightful piece of celebrity-obsessed entertainment.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

THE LAST MISTRESS

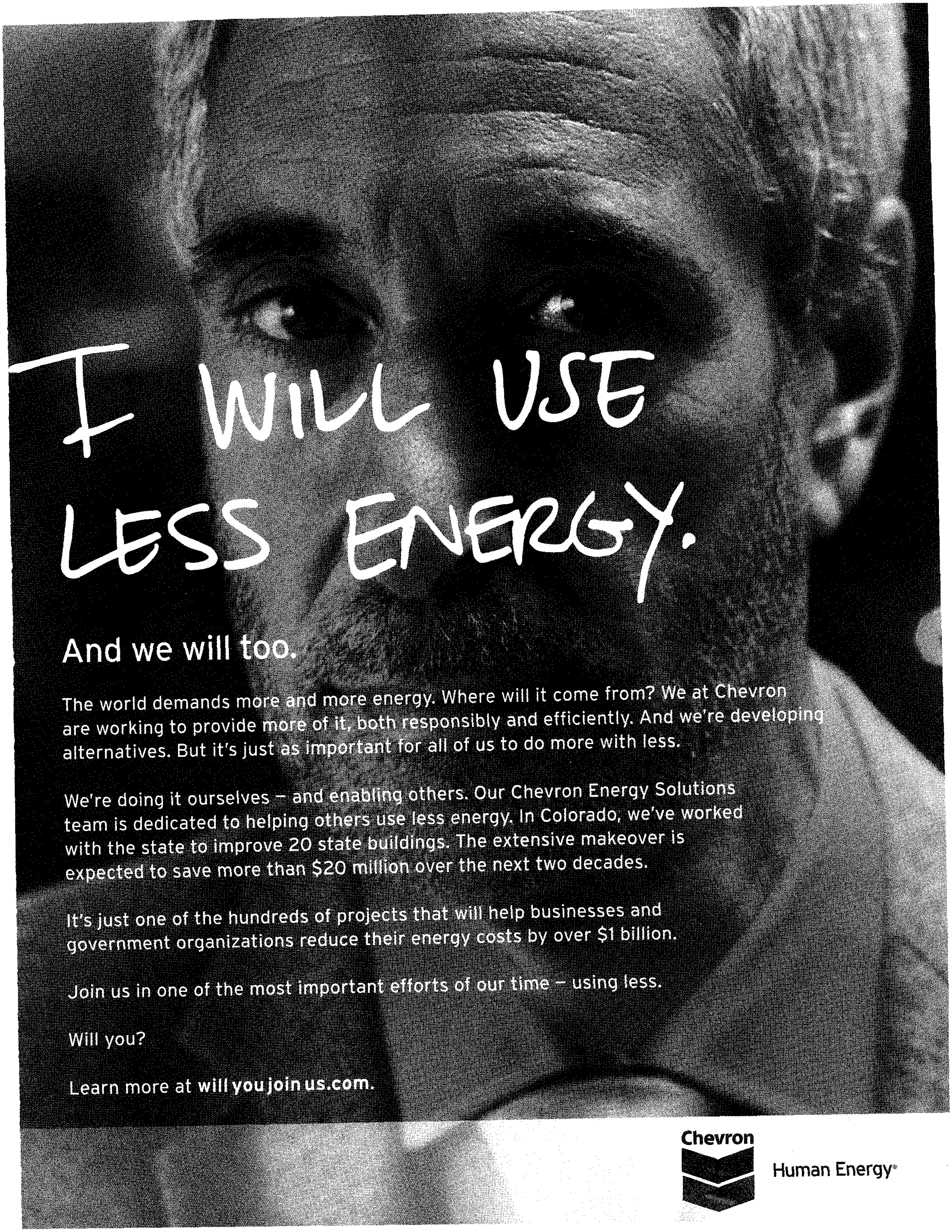
With the director Catherine Breillat, you know you'll get sex and pain; this period adaptation of an 1851 novel by Barbey d'Aurevilly delivers them with such style and conviction that her familiar themes become new again. A young Parisian nobleman, Ryno de Marigny (Fu'ad Aït Aattou), is about to marry the virginal Hermangarde de Polastron (Roxane Mesquida) despite his notorious ten-year affair with a cigar-smoking Spanish spitfire, Vellini (Asia Argento), a drawing-room Carmen who pursues her prey with ruthless audacity. In the kind of performance that is routinely called daring, Argento lets loose earsplitting screams and throws her naked body around with abandon, but she does the real work quietly, with smoldering stares and chilling whispers of mad intent. Breillat gives the entire cast of characters delicately declamatory manners that fit the refined depravity of their milieu, and she frames them in subtly sculptural images to match. From a knife blade to a broken glass, from a bullet to a gynecological ordeal, bloodshed saturates the taut dramatic fabric and suggests the destructive power of an obsession that owes little to pleasure. With Michael Lonsdale and Yolande Moreau as a chorus of elders who get caught up in the tumult. In French.—*Richard Brody* (BAM; Nov. 6.)

LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

A remarkably moving horror tale, about a pale, bullied twelve-year-old boy (Kåre Hedebrant) and his first love (Lina Leandersson), who happens to be a vampire. The film is set in 1982, in a snowy suburb of Stockholm, and the director, Tomas Alfredson, captures the dark, eerie stillness of the dead of winter in long, quiet takes, endowing the loneliness of the two main characters with a touching charm. John Lindqvist, adapting his own novel, wisely keeps away from the usual histrionic violence, and the few gruesome surprises are poetically memorable. The movie deals mainly with the problems of becoming a teen-ager (such as the quest for self-confidence and the meaning of loyalty), and it does so with artfulness and sincerity. The results are entrancing. In Swedish.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center.)

ONE DAY YOU'LL UNDERSTAND

From its first scene, a long and carefully choreographed tracking shot in which a man enters the Holocaust-memorial site in Paris, it's clear that the Israeli director Amos Gitai is straining to make moral statements by means of cinematic gestures. Despite the fascinating story at hand, he never lets it come to life, but smothers it beneath his arty intentions. Vic-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tor Bastien (Hippolyte Girardot), a Parisian lawyer, has become obsessed with a pile of papers belonging to his mother, Raymonde (Jeanne Moreau), née Gornick, whose parents, Russian Jewish immigrants, were deported from France during wartime and never seen again. He and his sister, Tania (Dominique Blanc), were raised Catholic and, though Raymonde never denied her origins, she never discussed them—or her wartime survival—with her children. In the course of his inquiry, which leads him to visit the small town where his maternal grandparents were arrested in 1944 (a horrific event that Gitai dramatizes heavy-handedly), he uncovers bitter family secrets, the revelation of which, after ninety minutes of generic Euro-cinema, complete with sentimental manipulation and intellectual veneer, drops with a dull thud. Even an extraordinary moment in the last shot, in which the emotional burden of memory appears with a bracing clarity, is rapidly dispelled by Gitai's self-important camera gesticulations. In French.—*R.B.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ROCKNROLLA

Unable to shake off a chronic fixation on criminals, whether petty or domineering, the British director Guy Ritchie—who made "Snatch" and "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels"—has returned to his fantastical vision of a London populated almost entirely by gangsters. Their names read like weak imitations of Runyon: One Two (Gerard Butler), Mumbles (Idris Elba), and Handsome Bob (Tom Hardy). These are lowly folk, under the thumbs of major players like Lenny (Tom Wilkinson) and the Russian interloper Uri (Karel Roden), but what binds them together, in one scrappy family, is the director's invitation to view their thuggery as consistently amusing. That can be done—"Guys and Dolls" itself aimed at something similar—but Ritchie's command of tone is far too unsteady, and his taste for lowlife longueurs much too indulgent, to keep the movie on track, and it crumples into self-parody long before the end. With Thandie Newton, ravishing yet implausible, as an accountant with dirty morals.—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

TABLES FOR TWO
YERBA BUENA

NATALIE MATUTSCHOVSKY

23 Avenue A (212-529-2919)—The term *yerba buena* refers to a number of different types of mint—exactly which depends on where in the Americas you are—and seems an apt name for a pan-Latin restaurant. Yerba Buena, which opened about four months ago in a slightly cursed East Village spot, unfussily pulls together a mix of cuisines—including Mexican (tacos), Peruvian (ceviche), and Cuban (a variation on the Cuban sandwich in pizza form)—in a room in which the dark wood, potted palms, and slatted blinds give the place a certain "Our Man in Havana" feel.

The chef, Julian Medina, has a way of making individual tastes register, often by slightly undercooking vegetables, and his care for detail—the airy batter on the tilapia or the balance of flavors in the guacamole—can have a transformative effect on familiar dishes. Salt is a keynote, often thanks to the use of *chicharrón* (deep-fried pork rind). This is first encountered in the *picadas*, a paper cone full of pork scraps, chorizo, fried plantain, and miniature croquettes. But the porcine climax of the evening is the *lechón*, or suckling pig. The pork, succulent and pulled, has the fibrous texture of prosciutto or Peking duck. If the kitchen at Yerba Buena is a striking success, the bar is even more so. Familiar drinks, like the mojito, acquire a new botanical intensity, and the barman, Artemio Vasquez, has a number of creations that, unlike most specialty cocktails, deserve to be more widely known. The Desert Rose, made with rose-infused gin and prickly-pear juice and graced with a single floating petal, mixes dewlike purity with a twist of tartness. The Poquito Picante is a pale-green blend of gin, cilantro, and cucumber, garnished with a dried jalapeño, so that the placid initial taste contains within it a delayed crescendo of bite.

There's a lot to be said for eating at the bar, because the bar staff's devotion to their art manifests itself in a kind of bibulous camaraderie, as they demonstrate cocktail-shake actions to each other; taste tequilas, mescals, and Dark-and-Stormys; and sometimes offer them to anyone who shows interest. As he passed each powerful potion around on a recent evening, Vasquez invariably justified it as being "good for the throat." Indeed, infectious conviviality suffuses the entire place. When a birthday occurs (one an hour seems to be the average), the honoree has to blow out a sparkler rather than a candle, and the entire restaurant tends to join in the singing. (Open daily for dinner; open weekends for brunch beginning Nov. 22. Entrées $22-$27).

—*Leo Carey*

RACHEL GETTING MARRIED

The new Jonathan Demme film is one of his slighter and more oddball affairs. It stars Anne Hathaway as Kym, who leaves rehab—where she is being treated for drug addiction—to attend the wedding of her sister Rachel (Rosemarie DeWitt). This takes place at the family home in Connecticut, which has become, for the occasion, a multiethnic menagerie of liberal optimists, many bearing musical instruments. Not surprisingly, the festive air is spoiled by the intrusion of Kym, who feels constrained by her protective father (Bill Irwin) and then flashes into fearsome combat with her mother (Debra Winger). The movie is too long, and often wearying to watch, taking its visual cues from the unappeasable restlessness of the heroine. Yet the scene in which she is welcomed home after a car accident, to be bathed and consoled by her sister without a word, has a real, if exhausted, tenderness; the smarting emotions on show here are seldom contrived, and anyone versed in family conflict—that is, anyone with a family—will flinch at those moments when Demme cuts close to the bone.—*A.L.* (10/6/08) (In limited release.)

ROLE MODELS

Paul Rudd is mainly the straight man in this wan, sentimental, occasionally very funny comedy. He and Seann William Scott star as a pair of dead-end marketers shilling an energy drink to high-school students. His frustration and anger lead to a run-in with the law that gets them both sentenced to community service with a Big Brothers-like organization—and, not surprisingly, these immature adults ultimately learn to grow up by helping children in need. Most of the comedy comes from a stunning array of supporting comedians from the Judd Apatow stable (including Jane Lynch, Ken Jeong, and, especially, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, immortal as McLovin in "Superbad"), who are turned loose and allowed to riff freely, as well as from an outrageous child, Bobb'e J. Thompson, who never becomes cloying. Unfortunately, the humor repeatedly strikes the same few notes and is exhausted long before the warmhearted ending. Poor Elizabeth Banks, as a lawyer and beleaguered fiancée, once again plays a responsible mother surrogate; she and Rudd both need some hard-edged drama to expand their intelligent, lively personae. Directed by David Wain.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK

The screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, who was responsible for "Adaptation," "Being John Malkovich," and other enlivening puzzles, has now directed a film of his own. Philip Seymour Hoffman plays Caden Cotard, who starts off running a small theatre company in Schenectady, and, following a sumptuous grant from the MacArthur Foundation, ends up spending decades on an altogether grander project—constructing a chunk of alternative city within New York, in which countless characters go about their scripted lives. It is an amazing conceit, but that, unfortunately, is more or less what it remains: a conceit, which, having taken half the film to get moving, then grows increasingly hard to grasp as a practical enterprise, and even harder to believe in. Figures from Caden's world are represented, within his magnum opus, by hired actors: thus, his colleague Hazel (Samantha Morton), for whom he has an enduring affection, is played by Tammy (Emily Watson), and Caden himself by Sammy (Tom Noonan). As a reflection on the human eagerness to tell tales about ourselves, and to make good on our disappointments through art, Kaufman's movie has fine flashes of black humor, and there is no mistaking the tenderness in the performances of Morton, Watson, and, later on, Dianne Wiest; but the overall result is a long slog, and the customary brightness of the writer's wit feels ever more clouded by the surrounding gloom. With Catherine Keener, as Caden's weary wife, and Hope Davis, as their counsellor.—*A.L.* (11/3/08) (In wide release.)

THE TIMES OF HARVEY MILK

This lucid, empathic 1984 documentary about the first openly gay elected official in California focusses on Harvey Milk as a grassroots politician who views gay rights as just one part of a democratizing movement in San Francisco government. He rose to a seat on the Board of Supervisors in 1977, after the city moved toward neighborhood rule; in chronicling his story, the filmmakers, Rob Epstein and Richard Schmeichen, choose an array of apt yet unpredictable eyewitnesses to his ascent, including a union activist, Jim Elliot, who remembers wondering how he could tell his union brothers to vote for "a fruit." Seeing Milk through their group lens, we share in his victory and are devastated all over again when a former Board member, Dan White, assassinates Milk and Mayor George Moscone. The ensuing trial, where White employed the infamous "Twinkie defense," fills you with an impatient anger, but it in no way diminishes this movie's aching beauty.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Nov. 6 and Nov. 8.)

W.

Oliver Stone's panoramic biography of the President as a hollow shell. Josh Brolin, as George Bush, works hard at shaping his body into effective imitation: he thrusts out his chin and flexes his shoulders, walks crotch forward, like a dismounted broncobuster, and speaks in short gusts, as if each little group of words were shot from a Colt .45. Brolin can't get below the surface, but perhaps no actor could—the way the movie has been conceived, there are no depths to plumb. Stanley Weiser's screenplay hits the Freudian family-drama aspects of the Bush saga over and over and in the most obvious way: the hard-drinking, pleasure-loving scapegrace son can never get enough approval from his stiff-jointed father, George Herbert Walker Bush (James Cromwell), and doesn't feel at ease until he redoes the Iraq war as a reckless adventure. What we never see is Bush's cunning; many scenes with the inner circle of advisers feel like a didactic school play. Richard Dreyfuss, however, is devastating as Dick Cheney, and the cast also includes Jeffrey Wright (Colin Powell), Scott Glenn (Donald Rumsfeld), Thandie Newton (Condoleezza Rice), Toby Jones (Karl Rove), and Elizabeth Banks (Laura Bush).—*D.D.* (10/27/08) (In wide release.)

WHAT JUST HAPPENED

Hollywood, not for the first time, stares at itself in the mirror. Robert De Niro plays Ben, a producer with problems. These range from the professional, such as the parlous previews of his latest film, to the woundingly intimate, such as his unfaded love for an ex-wife (Robin Wright Penn), who has turned her attentions not just elsewhere but to a mere screenwriter (Stanley Tucci). Real stars, including Sean Penn and a Moses-bearded Bruce Willis, play versions of themselves, which adds lightly to the air of authenticity, yet the over-all atmosphere is too thin and stale to be refreshing. The director is Barry Levinson, and the script was adapted by Art Linson from his own memoirs of the movie business, so nobody could accuse them of not knowing their subject; yet their familiarity gives the project the fatal coziness of an insiders' sport, with few of the one-liners hitting home. A first-rate cast (which includes Catherine Keener and John Turturro) is deployed to press a satirical point with which most of us already agree. As for De Niro, he lacks the expansiveness for the role; if you like your movie producers to be monsters, not whiners, forget this, skip back fifty years or so, and try Rod Steiger in "The Big Knife."—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

ZACK AND MIRI MAKE A PORNO
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BEVERLY HILLS CHIHUAHUA: In wide release. **PRIDE AND GLORY:** In wide release. **THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. Nov. 5-6 at 7 and 9:15: "Monks—the Transatlantic Feedback" (2006, Dietmar Post and Lucia Palacios). ♦ The films and videos of Robert Frank. Nov. 7 at 7 and Nov. 11 at 9: "Pull My Daisy" (1959, co-directed by Alfred Leslie), "The Sin of Jesus" (1961), and "O.K. End Here" (1963). ♦ Nov. 7 at 9:15: "Me and My Brother" (1965-68, reëdited in 1997). ♦ Nov. 8 at 4:30: Short-film program, including "Conversations in Vermont" (1969). ♦ Nov. 9 at 4:45: Short-film program, including "Fire in the East: A Portrait of Robert Frank" (1986, Philip and Amy Brookman). ♦ Nov. 9 at 7: "Candy Mountain" (1988, co-directed by Rudy Wurlitzer). ♦ Nov. 9 at 9: Short-film program, including "Life Dances On" (1980). ♦ Nov. 10 at 7: "Hunter" (1989, in English, German, and Turkish) and "C'est Vrai (One Hour)" (1990). ♦ Nov. 10 at 9:15: Short-film program, including "Run" (1989). ♦ Nov. 11 at 7: Short-film program, including "Moving Pictures" (1994). ♦ "Essential Cinema." The films of Stan Brakhage. Nov. 8 at 6: Short-film program, including "Window Water Baby Moving" (1959). ♦ Nov. 9 at 3: "Dog Star Man" (1961-64). ♦ "Degrees of Remove." Nov. 9 at 5: Short-film program, including "Orchard Street" (1956, Ken Jacobs), "Pendulum" (1976, James Nares), and "New York Portrait, Part 2" (1980-81, Peter Hutton), followed by a discussion with Hutton, Jacobs, and Nares.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Asia Argento. Nov. 5 at 7:30 and 9:30: "The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things" (2005, Argento). ♦ Nov. 6 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Last Mistress" (†). ♦ Nov. 7 at 2, 4:30, 6:50 and 9:15: "Boarding Gate" (2007, Olivier Assayas). ♦ Nov. 8 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Cindy: The Doll Is Mine" (2005, Bertrand Bonello) and "The Mother of Tears" (2007, Dario Argento). ♦ Nov. 9 at 3, 6, and 9: "On War" (2008, Bonello). ♦ "Master of Melodrama: Teuvo Tulio." Nov. 10 at 6:50 and 9:15: "In the Fields of Dreams" (1940, in Finnish). ♦ "Pordenone Silent Film Tuesdays." Nov. 11 at 7: "Orphans of the Storm" (1921, D. W. Griffith).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 5-6 at 1:30, 4:10, 7, and 9:35: "Rosemary's Baby" (1968, Roman Polanski). ♦ Nov. 7-13 at 1, 2:45, 4:30, 6:15, 8, and 9:45: "The Wild Child" (1970, François Truffaut; in French).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"CinémaTuesdays." Nov. 11 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Max Mon Amour" (1988, Nagisa Oshima; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Through Nov. 13: The films of Arnaud Desplechin. Except where noted, all films are in French. Nov. 5-6 at 2, 4:30, 7:00, and 9:30: "L'Aimée (2007) and "La Vie des Morts"(1991). ♦ Nov. 7 at 3, 6, and 9; Nov. 9 at 5 and 8; and Nov. 13 at 1 and 9:30: "Kings and Queen" (2004). ♦ Nov. 8 at 1:30, 5, and 8:30 and Nov. 9 at 1:30: "My Sex Life . . . or, How I Got Into an Argument" (1996). ♦ Nov. 10 at 1, 4, and 9:45 and Nov. 13 at 4: "La Sentinelle" (1992). ♦ Nov. 11 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "Playing 'In the Company of Men' " (2003). Nov. 12 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "Esther Kahn" (2000; in English). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Nov. 7-8: "An American Werewolf in London" (1981, John Landis). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction." Nov. 11 at 8: "The Dungeon Masters" (2008, Keven McAlester), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"To Save and Project." Nov. 5 at 6:15: "Touki Bouki" (1973, Djibril Diop Mambéty; in Wolof). ♦ Nov. 5-6 at 8:15 and Nov. 7 at 4:15: "Hell Drivers" (1957, Cy Endfield) and "Inflation" (1942, Endfield). ♦ Nov. 6 at 6 and Nov. 8 at 8:30: "The Times of Harvey Milk" (†). ♦ Nov. 7 at 6:30 and Nov. 8 at 2: "Hapax Legomena I-VII" (1971-72, Hollis Frampton), introduced by Bill Brand. ♦ Nov. 9 at 3: "Western Union" (1941, Fritz Lang). ♦ Nov. 9 at 5: "Men in War" (1957, Anthony Mann). ♦ "Kino 2008." Except where noted, all films are in German. Nov. 5 at 6:30: "Cherry Blossoms" (2008, Doris Dörrie; in German, English, and Japanese), introduced by the director and Hannelore Elsner. ♦ Nov. 6 at 8:45: "Clara" (2008, Helma Sanders-Brahms). ♦ Nov. 7 at 6:15 and Nov. 8 at 7:30: "Cloud 9" (2008, Andreas Dresen), introduced by the director. ♦ Nov. 7 at 8:30 and Nov. 8 at 5: "The Wave" (2008, Dennis Gansel), introduced by the director and the actress Jennifer Ulrich. ♦ Special screenings. Nov. 8 at 6:30 and Nov. 9 at 1:30: The films of William K.-L. Dickson, introduced by the historian Paul Spehr.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-712-7237)—The Silent Clowns Film Series. Nov. 9 at 2: Short comedies from Educational Pictures, followed by a Q. & A. with the historians Bruce Lawton and Steve Massa.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Nov. 7 at 9:30: "The Battle of Algiers" (1966, Gillo Pontecorvo; in French and Arabic), introduced by the writer Francine Prose.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Andrzej Wajda. Except where noted, all films are in Polish. Nov. 5 at 1:30 and Nov. 6 at 6:30: "The Possessed" (1988; in French). ♦ Nov. 5 at 3:45 and Nov. 6 at 8:50: "Chronicle of Love Affairs" (1986). ♦ Nov. 5 at 6:15 and Nov. 6 at 4: "Danton" (1983; in French and Polish). ♦ Nov. 5 at 8:45: "Man of Iron" (1981). ♦ Nov. 6 at 2 and Nov. 8 at 5:30: "A Love in Germany" (1983; in German and Polish). ♦ Nov. 7 at 1 and Nov. 9 at 1:30: "Korczak" (1990). ♦ Nov. 7 at 6:45 and Nov. 10 at 2: "The Ring with a Crowned Eagle" (1993). ♦ Nov. 7 at 9 and Nov. 10 at 4:15: "Nastasya" (1994). ♦ Nov. 8 at 7:45 and Nov. 11 at 1: "Pan Tadeusz" (1999). ♦ Nov. 9 at 3:45: "Holy Week" (1995). ♦ Nov. 10 at 6:20: "Miss Nobody" (1996). ♦ Nov. 10 at 8:30 and Nov. 11 at 4: "The Lesson of Polish Cinema" (2002) and "Credit and Debit: Andrzej Wajda Remembers" (1999).

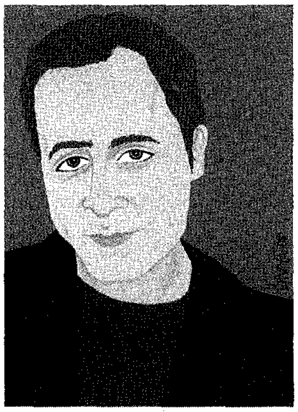
READINGS AND TALKS

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
When the real-estate mogul Seymour Durst died, in 1995, he left behind some nine thousand books about the city in which he had made his fortune, New York. The collection was donated to City University of New York, and it is housed at the university's Graduate Center, which has organized a new reading series drawing on it. It starts with Jimmy Breslin, Jules Feiffer, Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., and others reading works by the likes of Wash-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MUSICAL POLITICS

The pianist Jeremy Denk has established himself as perhaps the leading humorist-intellectual of the classical-music blogosphere, if that is not too esoteric a category. In a recent post at www.jeremydenk.net, he published a purported interview with Governor Sarah Palin on the subject of Beethoven's Sonata No. 29, "Hammerklavier," in which she proposed that "a composer is a lot like a musicologist, except that he has actual notes to put down on paper"; attacked "immigrant" notes that encroach upon the key of B-flat; and advised, regarding the densely figured fugal finale, that Denk should simply "trill, baby, trill." This silliness may be Denk's way of venting tension in advance of his Zankel Hall recital début, on Nov. 11, in which he will play one of the most demanding recital programs in recent memory: the "Hammerklavier" and Charles Ives's no less monumental "Concord" Sonata. Prior concerts have suggested that Denk has the chops, the brains, and the heart to pull it off. Whether Palin will attend is unknown at this writing.

—*Alex Ross*



DIVYA SRINIVASAN

ington Irving, Theodore Dreiser, and Murray Kempton. (Fifth Ave. at 34th St. For reservations, which are required, call 212-817-8215. Nov. 6 at 6:30.)

LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM
Ben Greenman, an editor at this magazine, celebrates the publication of "Correspondences," his new limited-edition handcrafted collection of stories about letters and letter writing. He'll be joined by the writer Arthur Nersesian. (108 Orchard St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 6 at 6:30.)

POETS FORUM
The Academy of American Poets examines the state of contemporary poetry with three days of talks, readings, and walking tours. Highlights include readings by Frank Bidart, Sharon Olds, Robert Pinsky, Kay Ryan, Gary Snyder, and others on Nov. 6 at 7 (Times Center, 242 W. 41st St.); readings by Lucie Brock-Broido, Louise Glück, Eamon Grennan, Brigit Pegeen Kelly, Rusty Morrison, and others on Nov. 7 at 7 (New School, 66 W. 12th St.); and a day of discussions at New York University on Nov. 8. (For more information, visit www.poets.org.)

THE MONTAUK CLUB
Twenty-three years ago, David Sharps, a clown and juggler by trade, bought a derelict 1914 Lehigh Valley Railroad barge for a dollar. He has spent considerably more restoring the craft, which is now tied up in Red Hook and which he now lives in with his family and operates as a museum and theatre. On Nov. 6 at 7:30, he tells the story of how this came to be. (25 Eighth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn. For reservations, which are required, call 646-334-0241.)

STEVEN KASHER GALLERY
The S.D.S. founder and activist Tom Hayden, the Weather Underground leader Bernardine Dohrn, the former Black Panther Jamal Joseph, and Josh Marshall, of the online news organization Talking Points Memo, join David Fenton, the former Liberation News Service photographer, for a discussion about the legacy of the late-sixties Vietnam War protests. Fenton's photographs from the period will be on display. (521 W. 23rd St. For more information, visit www.stevenkasher.com. Nov. 8 at 3:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

COMFORTING TREATS
With the election over, an opportunity to indulge in some celebratory (or soothing) sweets presents itself as the eleventh annual New York Chocolate Show gets under way, Nov. 7-9. Some sixty leading chocolatiers will be displaying their goodies. (Pier 94, Twelfth Ave at 55th St. For more information, visit www.chocolateshow.com.) ♦ Those looking for something a bit stronger can stop by *Malt Advocate* magazine's annual WhiskyFest New York for a taste of more than two hundred whiskeys from around the world. (New York Marriott Marquis, 1535 Broadway. Nov. 11, from 6:30 to 10. For more information, visit www.maltadvocate.com.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
With contemporary-art sales in London sluggish, art-market aficionados have been watching for the deflation of prices in New York. Crunch time begins this week, with the big houses' sales of Impressionist and modern art. **Christie's** gets things started with an evening sale (Nov. 5) devoted to the twentieth-century collections of two late patronesses and philanthropists, Alice Lawrence and Rita K. Hillman (and her late husband, Alex Hillman). Both are wide-ranging and include works by such big names as Manet, Cézanne, Rothko, and de Chirico. Next comes the nail-biter: the Impressionist-modern evening sale (Nov. 6). It has its share of beauties, including a characteristically mystical Kandinsky ("Studie zu Improvisation 3"), a surrealistic depiction of Marie-Thérèse by Picasso, and a group of figures ("Trois Hommes Qui Marchent I") by Alberto Giacometti, an artist who just this year set an auction record. This is preceded by a larger day sale (Nov. 6), with works by Pissarro, Miró, Vuillard, and Chagall (among others), as well as a final auction of works on paper (Nov. 7). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** begins its Impressionist-modern auction early in the week, with a well-stocked evening sale (Nov. 3) that includes a Degas ballerina ("Danseuse au Repos"), as well as important works by Malevich and Münch. The house's day sale, two days later (Nov. 5), has a significant number of Russian paintings, like the luminous "View of St. Petersburg" (more precisely, the Neva, as seen from the Troitsky Bridge), by the nineteenth-century painter Alexei Petrovich Bogoliubov, as well as works by Soutine and that tortured Viennese Schiele. An impressive silver dinner service with an equally impressive pedigree—it was made for Stéphanie de Beauharnais, the adopted daughter of Napoleon Bonaparte—crowns the sale of French furniture that follows on Nov. 6. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

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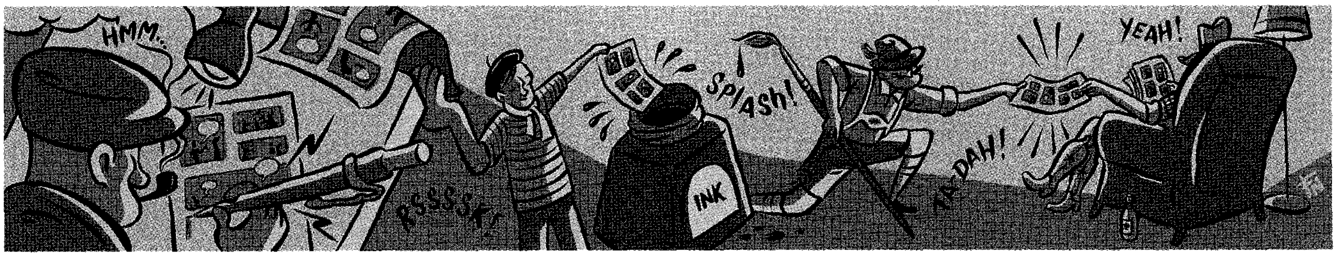
HMM...
PSSSSK!
SPLASH!
INK
TA-DAH!
YEAH!

FIDO NESTI

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
COUGAR CLUB
Nov. 14

Roundabout Theatre Company revives the Rodgers and Hart musical "Pal Joey," in which an aspiring night-club owner leaves his girlfriend for an older woman. Christian Hoff, Martha Plimpton, and Stockard Channing star. (212-719-1300.)

MOVIES
CRITICAL EYE
Nov. 14-20

Walter Reade's tribute to the critic and painter Manny Farber, who died in August at age ninety-one, offers twenty-two classics he championed, including Howard Hawks's "Scarface" and Jean-Luc Godard's "Two or Three Things I Know About Her," as well as a short film directed by Paul Schrader about one of Farber's paintings. (212-875-5610.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
OVERSEAS LINES
Nov. 17-21

"Graphic Novels from Europe" brings together leading practitioners of the form from abroad, including Jaromír Švejdík, a.k.a. Jaromir 99, and Jaroslav Rudiš (from the Czech Republic), David B. and Nicolas de Crécy (France), and Max (Spain), for a week of discussions and readings. (www.goethe.de/newyork.)

ART
ISN'T IT ROMANTIC
Nov. 18-March 15

Valentine's Day will come early to the Metropolitan Museum, when it surveys the art-historical impact of betrothal and marriage in the show "Art and Love in Renaissance Italy." Works by Titian, Botticelli, and Parmigianino will be shown alongside centuries-old wedding gifts of majolica, Venetian glassware, and jewelry. (212-535-7710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ETERNAL LOVE
Nov. 23-24

The fierce and mysterious work of John Zorn swoops through the worlds of classical, jazz, and Hebraic music. He brings his gentler side to "Shir Ha-Shirim," a setting of the Song of Songs for female voices that will be performed at the Guggenheim Museum. (212-423-3587.)

"Graphic Novels from Europe," at various venues.

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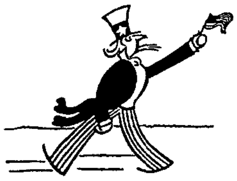
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE TEST



In 1934, President Franklin Roosevelt asked Frances Perkins, his Secretary of Labor, to draft a plan that might help Americans escape poverty in old age. "Keep it simple," he told her. "So simple that everybody will understand it." On August 14, 1935, after bargaining in Congress, Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act at a White House ceremony. The law "represents a cornerstone in a structure which is being built but is by no means complete," the President said. He continued:

> It is a structure intended to lessen the force of possible future depressions. . . . It is, in short, a law that will take care of human needs and at the same time provide the United States an economic structure of vastly greater soundness.

Roosevelt hoped that the elderly would also receive health insurance; Congress balked. It took thirty years—until July 30, 1965, when Lyndon Johnson signed the Medicare bill—to protect older Americans from the ravages of sickness as well as poverty. These were Democratic initiatives, but they gradually became national compacts: Ronald Reagan defended Social Security, and George W. Bush expanded Medicare. They, too, came to recognize that a sound system of social insurance enabled by government makes capitalism and its splendid innovations (the iPhone, the Cartoon Network, the Ultimate Fishing Tool, etc.) more balanced and sustainable.

Last week, the Department of Commerce reported that the economy is shrinking. Almost certainly, the United States has entered its twelfth official recession since Roosevelt's death. Most of the past eleven recessions have been short and mild, in part because of the "automatic stabilizers," as economists call them, created by New Deal-inspired insurance and regulatory regimes. The current financial crisis, however, has already proved so severe and so volatile that it has smashed or bypassed a number of important shock absorbers. Some economists fear that this downturn may therefore be atypically long and painful.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The country is fortunate in one respect: the sudden buckling of financial safeguards has put just about everyone in touch with his inner New Dealer. Even Alan Greenspan recently confessed to Congress a crisis of faith in self-regulation. Meanwhile, former free-market true believers in the Bush Administration have tossed out money from the public vault like looters, and just as untidily; if they can sort out exactly what they have done, the Treasury's mandarins must soon prepare PowerPoint presentations to document for their successors the most expansive nationalizations undertaken in the United States since the Second World War. The Administration seems giddy with a discovery familiar in the palaces of certain despots: yes, you can just print the bills on your own presses and hand them out to your friends.

Embedded in this festival of emergency measures, however, is an important and possibly durable ideological shift. Last week, in an op-ed in the Washington *Post*, Martin Feldstein, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Reagan Administration, and, more recently, an adviser to John McCain, endorsed large-scale spending on public works as a way to stimulate economic recovery. This was a bit like Al Gore embracing coal. The essay's appearance indicated that a broad coalition is emerging, where none existed a year ago, in favor of New Deal-style expenditures on roads, bridges, broadband lines, alternative energy, and the like, to support economic recovery and future growth. Such investment could strengthen the economy for a generation, as Eisenhower's Interstate Highway System did.

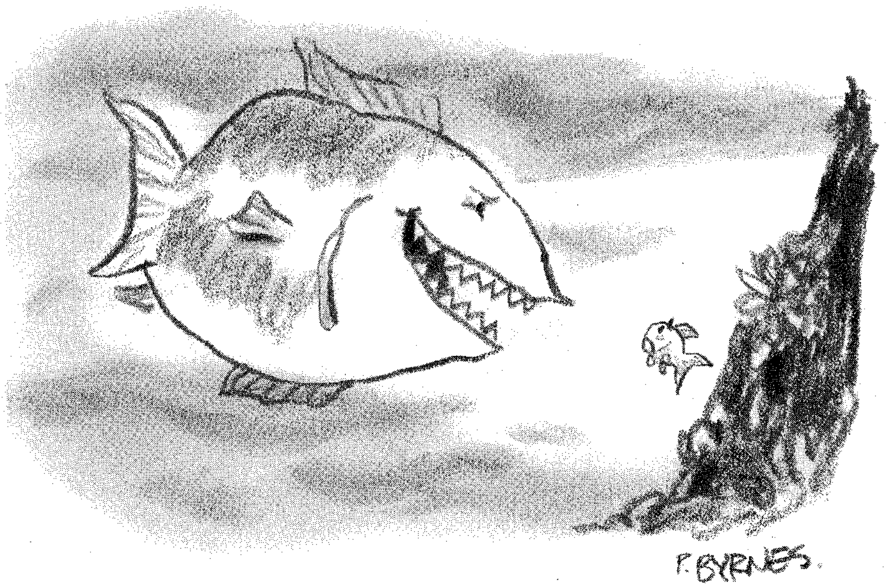
It's not enough, of course, just to be like Ike. The campaign of 2008 was notable for its misleading narratives about how Presidents are tested. From the wacky competition over 3 A.M. phone calls to McCain's alleged campaign suspension, it was suggested repeatedly that Presidents are best measured by their day-to-day crisis-management skills. Of course, sound judgment under pressure is essential to a successful Presidency, and its absence can prove disastrous (see Bush, post-Afghanistan; see Bush, post-Katrina). Coolheadedness on its own is sometimes enough to earn lasting gratitude (see Kennedy, Cuban missile crisis). Yet, great Presidencies can arise only from great causes. To define them and deliver on them is the truer test of the officeholder.

The next Presidency has within its reach at least two generation-spanning causes: the need to jump-start a new energy economy, and, in so doing, help to contain climate change; and the need to enact a plan to provide quality health care to all Americans, and, in so doing, complete the project of social insurance that Roosevelt described in 1935. Each of these projects is urgent, but it is health-care reform that speaks more directly to the economic and human dimensions of the present downturn.

The accumulating failures in the country's health-care system are a cause of profound weakness in the American economy; unaddressed, this weakness will exacerbate the coming recession and crimp its aftermath. A large number of the country's housing foreclosures in recent years appear to be related to medical problems and health-care expenses. American businesses often can't afford to hire as many employees as they would like because of rising health-insurance costs; employees often can't afford to quit to chase their better-mousetrap dreams because they can't risk going without coverage. Add to this the system's moral failings: about twenty-two thousand people die in this country annually because they lack health insurance. That is more than the number of Americans who are murdered in a year.

Presidents who help right a wrong of this character are generally immortalized in granite, but to succeed they require a transformation-minded Congress, too. The next Congress will likely be without the active leadership of its great lion of social reform, Ted Kennedy. There is only one senator with the wonky expertise, work habits, and political stature to fill Kennedy's place: Hillary Clinton. The psychology she would bring to this inheritance would surely be complex, but no health-care-reform bill will pass without her. Lyndon Johnson, also a person of complex psychology, understood this politics of legacy well. At the Medicare signing ceremony, he invited Jimmy Roosevelt, F.D.R.'s eldest son, and the aging Harry Truman, who had pushed hard for health-care reform, to share the glory. Johnson, in his remarks, linked them (and himself, of course) to the Social Security Act and its "illustrious place in history," and he carefully recited an "honor roll" of fifteen congressional leaders who contributed to the bill's passage. It was, Johnson said, a "time for triumph." It is, even more so, today.

—Steve Coll



"What would Darwin do?"

ALASKA POSTCARD

BAKED

Last Tuesday morning—a week before Election Day—John McCain called on Senator Ted Stevens, of Alaska, the longest-serving Republican in Congress, to step down. The day before, a jury in Washington, D.C., had found Stevens guilty on seven counts of lying on his financial-disclosure forms in order to conceal gifts that he had received from oil-industry executives: a sled dog, a gas barbecue grill, an electronic massage chair, the addition of a new story to his house—in all, more than a quarter million dollars' worth of booty. Stevens, who is eighty-four, was seeking a seventh term in the Senate, and now, after a five-week trial that had kept him in Washington throughout the campaign season, he was a convicted felon. For McCain, who had never much liked him, denouncing and renouncing Stevens was an obvious political move.

But McCain's running mate, Sarah Palin, was more circumspect. She greeted Stevens's conviction with a statement in which she proclaimed herself a fighter against corruption but avoided taking a stand on the case. She said only, "I'm confident Senator Stevens will do what is right for the people of Alaska." Pressed to clarify what that right thing would be, Palin eventually took a line more consistent with McCain's, saying, "The time has come for him to step aside." But she was careful not to hurry him out the door. "Even if elected on Tuesday," she went on, "Senator Stevens should step aside to allow a special election to give Alaskans a real choice of who will serve them in Congress."

In late summer, when Stevens was facing trial, and Palin had not yet been

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tapped by McCain, there was speculation in Alaska that she might maneuver to replace Stevens on the senatorial ballot. Now, in the last week of the campaign, with a Barack Obama victory looking increasingly likely, Alaskan politicos parsed her second statement on Stevens. "If she returns to Alaska, Palin could pursue appointing herself," Tony Hopfinger, an editor of the blog AlaskaDispatch, wrote. "Another scenario would be Palin filling Stevens' post with a Republican seat-warmer, then running for senator in the special election." Dermot Cole, a columnist for the pro-Stevens Fairbanks *Daily News-Miner,* said, "I think that was a carefully planned statement, and it differed from what McConnell"—Mitch McConnell, the Senate Minority Leader—"and others are saying: that he should resign immediately. I think some elements in the Republican Party are thinking that way, urging him to stay in to keep the seat Republican—it's not a very resounding endorsement."

"If Stevens wins but the Senate takes action against him, what happens next?" Beth Kerttula, a Democratic state representative, who serves as the House minority leader in the legislature in Juneau, said. "Even in the grocery store tonight I heard somebody say, 'Well, what if she quit and her lieutenant governor appointed her?' We're wondering."

Throughout the fall, even though he was in court, Stevens enjoyed the devotion of his constituency and ran in a dead heat with his Democratic challenger, Mark Begich, the mayor of Anchorage. But the guilty verdict hurt him, giving Begich as much as an eight-point lead.

Before Palin left to run for Vice-President, her successes in the legislature depended on working with Democrats, but her hyper-partisanship in the national campaign has damaged those relationships. In her absence, a state investigation found that she had violated state ethics laws and abused her power as governor in the firing of the state-police chief after he refused to help her carry out a personal vendetta. In addition, a new ethics complaint has been filed against her, for billing taxpayers for her daughters' travel expenses. "All of these things she has to come back and answer for if she loses this election," Begich said. "And she won't be able to hide from the press here: they've been waiting." To hear him talk, a return to Alaska would be as much an exile for Palin as a homecoming—a "long, dark" winter, he said, "and maybe a little chilly."

"She seems to be one of those people who always stay one step ahead of the axe," Beth Kerttula said. Of course, Ted Stevens always seemed like one of those people, too. So, just as Palin declared herself "cleared of any legal wrongdoing" when the Troopergate report found her to have violated state laws, Stevens returned to Alaska following his conviction—some of his supporters greeted him in T-shirts bearing the slogan "F*#@ the Feds Vote for Ted!"—and said, "I have not been convicted of anything."

—Philip Gourevitch

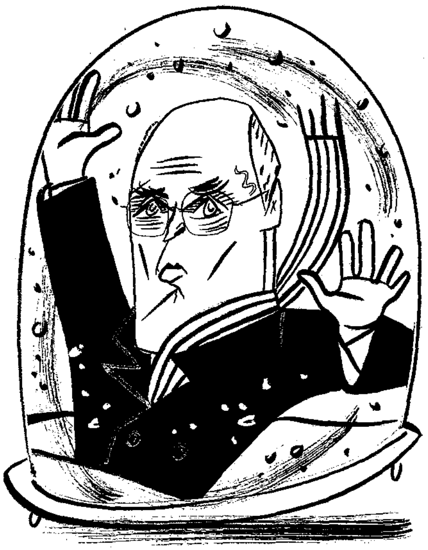
ON WALL STREET

TOMBSTONES

Of all the sad Wall Street scenes—Lehman employees shuffling out of their offices in shorts, "reduction in force" victims commiserating over drinks on Stone Street—one of the saddest might be the headquarters of Icon Recognition, a company that makes deal toys, the desktop trophies (sometimes called "deal gifts" or "tombstones") collected by a lot of finance types to commemorate deals. On an afternoon not long ago, a conference room there had a day-after-Christmas feeling: boxes everywhere, rows of lonely Lucite toys (a cube with 3-D shoes etched inside, a fake bottle of suntan lotion). "This is definitely a tough time," Stephen Sokoler, the president of the company, said. He'd been up early working the phones: "You call and ask, 'Is there anyone who's announced a deal recently or closed a deal? Anyone you've heard of?' " He added, "It feels like we're a ship in the middle of a storm. Not only are you in the storm but there's no visibility as to whether the storm's gonna clear."

Sokoler, who is twenty-nine, came to the company in 2002, and he recalled, with some wistfulness, the go-go days of the business, when, for example, he made a faux emerald-and-ruby crown to celebrate a deal for Merrill Lynch, and J. P. Morgan ordered up a batch of ten-by-fifteen-inch Lucite blocks with dinosaur heads inside (three hundred dollars each)—a "Jurassic Park" reference—to celebrate a deal involving Universal. "That was just a monstrous piece," Sokoler said.

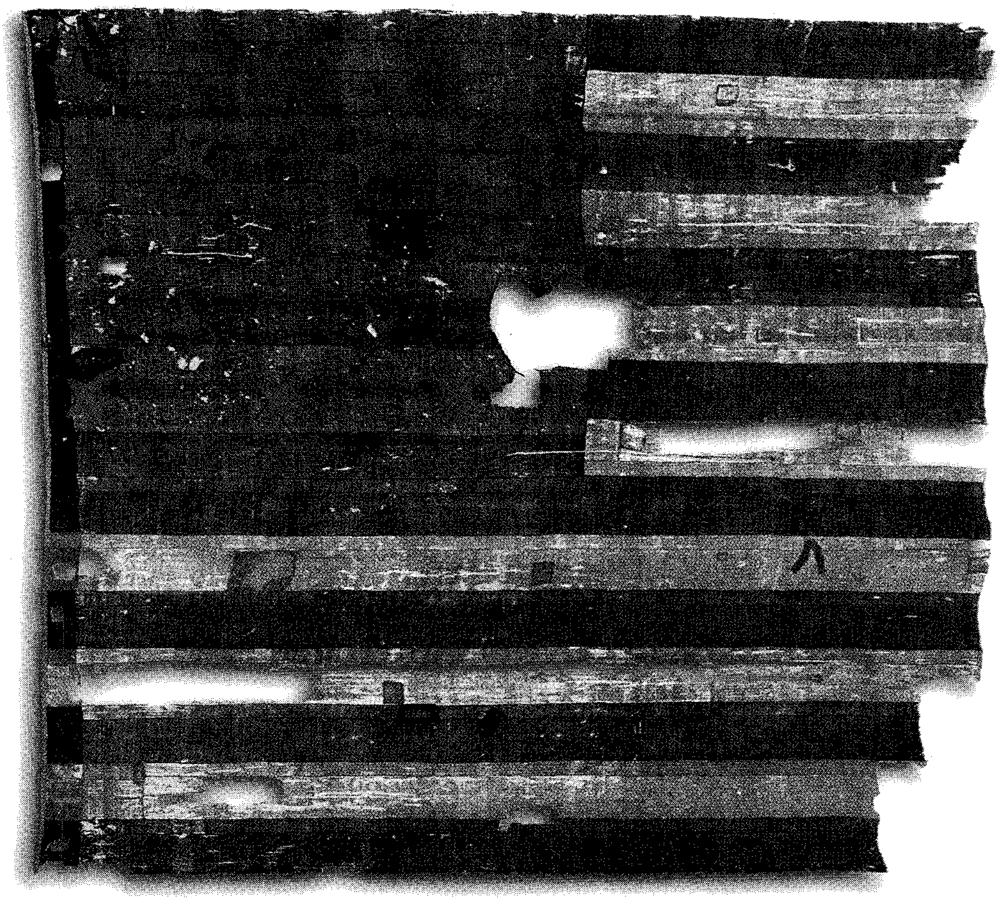
The most recent era of toys—the one that just ended—had been exuberant, too: a gold-plated replica of the Mandalay Bay Hotel, in Las Vegas, commissioned by Merrill Lynch; a Lucite banana split, commemorating Sun Capital Partners' acquisition of Friendly's; a snow globe made for Northoil ("Inside the snow globe we have placed a pewter casting of an oil rig," the ad material says). Sokoler pointed to a catalogue picture of a little banjo, commemorating a deal that Merrill did for G.E. called Project Bluegrass. "Isn't that cool?" he said. "You can actually play it."



Henry Paulson

He was joined by Kathryn Kerns, a salesperson, who had just come back from a trip to the cubicles at Goldman Sachs. (Deal toys are usually commissioned by junior analysts.) It was not long after the news broke that Goldman might lay off ten per cent of its staff, but the scene, Kerns reported, had been eerily calm. "I get the impression that people are either very busy now or they're getting a lot more downtime," she said. Goldman recently sent an e-mail to employees announcing that they would have to start paying for their own deal toys, but Sokoler thinks that such mandates will eventually be relaxed. "Every once in a while, you see rules like that," he said. Somehow, people have continued to fill their windowsills with

THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER



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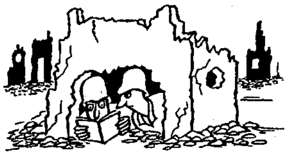
This spring came what Kern called "the tiny-globe craze." Sokoler rolled his eyes. "Oh, don't start with that," he said. "You know those things you see in Sharper Image, where there's a base and a little globe just floats over it?" (They work by means of magnets.) Somebody at Merrill decided to order a hundred of them to celebrate an M.&A. deal, and all of a sudden everybody had to have one. "It was a real pain in the ass," Sokoler said. "People were calling my cell phone in the middle of the night, saying, 'It's not floating!' And you'd have to, like, walk them through it. You'd say, 'Yes, it *is* floating—you just have to hold it in the right place.' "

There will always be deal toys of some kind, Sokoler predicted (Icon Recognition is already coming up with a pitch to commemorate Bank of America's acquisition of Merrill), but, lately, more traditional designs have resurfaced—the simple tombstone, for example, with the name of the lead firm on the left. "It's more in keeping with the mood," Kerns said. Sokoler wandered over to a miniature statue of the god Apollo, commissioned to celebrate a private-equity deal for Apollo Capital. Apollo was barechested, and his foot was planted on the torso of a writhing grizzly bear, which he seemed about to shoot in the face with a tiny bow and arrow. "This was sketched by a banker," Sokoler said—an analyst at J. P. Morgan. Sokoler pointed out Apollo's rippling muscles, and the bear's ears and teeth. "To be honest, I don't think any other company could make this," he said. He shrugged. "I think the bear won."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

THE BOARDS
THEATRE OF WAR



"Black Watch," a play about the famed Scottish regiment's deployment in Iraq, received rapturous reviews during its initial three-week run at St. Ann's Warehouse, in Brooklyn, last fall. ("In the final marching sequence, as the men moved forward and stumbled in shifting patterns, I found to my surprise that I was crying," Ben Brantley confessed in the *Times*.) All well and good; but, as a result, Susan Feldman, the theatre's artistic director, said, "we felt it didn't have a chance to have a diverse audience." So this season, when the National Theatre of Scotland brought the show back, Feldman instituted a "Pay for a Vet" program, whereby patrons could procure tickets for veterans who felt inclined to revisit what they had already experienced in the theatre of war in the theatre of Dumbo.

One recent Sunday night, forty-odd vets attended the show. Dressed in mufti, they were not always easy to distinguish from the rest of the audience, though there were certain indicators. (The burly guy wearing a sweater into which a stars-and-stripes pattern had been knitted was surely not a season-ticket holder at St. Ann's, at least not yet; and, for once, not every close-cropped head betrayed a hipster coping with early-onset male-pattern baldness.) During the show—which is based on interviews with Scottish soldiers but which includes plangent songs in dialect, and incorporates something approaching ballet in the representation of a fistfight—there was also loud laughter from certain quarters at the play's linguistic vérité. (A typical line: "Fucking hell ay. If this is the Quick Reaction Force we're fucked. What the fuck are youse cunts dayin'?")

After the performance, the vets, gathered at the theatre bar, were drafted as theatre critics. "I really liked it, and I didn't think it was over the top," Kris Hrones, a former marine who served in Iraq, and who is now an assistant U.S. attorney, said. Hrones had particularly appreciated the depictions of the soldiers' limited entertainment options (dismembered paperbacks, porn). "Sex is the common denominator when everyone is scared or bored," he said. "Especially bored." Tony Davis, a Vietnam veteran, said that he had been moved by the concluding marching sequence. "They kept regrouping, even though they got shot at and killed—I kind of teared up at that," he said. In one scene, soldiers used gesture to articulate responses to letters from home, miming the rocking of babies or the aching of hearts. "Except you had to visualize the 'Dear John' part, because most of those letters were 'Dear John' letters," Davis said.

At least one veteran declared himself a conscientious objector to the general approval of the play. "I didn't join the Army because I didn't want to work the deli counter at a convenience store," Jason Everman, a heavily tattooed, bearded veteran of the Army Rangers and the Special Forces, who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, said, referring to the play's depiction of soldiers as having been motivated to enlist by the lack of alternatives. "I joined the Army because I had a specific agenda: to develop the warrior aspect of my persona."

As a teen-ager living in Washington state, Everman explained, he had been inspired by the "Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini." "He was the quintessential Renaissance man: an accomplished warrior, an artist, a philosopher," he said. Everman had already taken care of the artistic aspect of his persona, a friend who was with him said, at which Everman admitted that he had been a guitarist. (No kidding: post-encounter intelligence reveals that in the early nineties he played with Nirvana and Soundgarden.) Having left the military in 2006, he is now studying philosophy at Columbia University. "It's the Platonic ideal of the tripartite soul," he said. "Wisdom, courage, and temperance. Those are Plato's words, not mine."

When pressed, he took issue with the antiwar sentiment that the play ultimately expresses. ("This is nay fucking fighting," one soldier says, while watching a four-hour assault by American forces. "This is just plain old-fashioned bullying like.") "War sucks—I can say that with empirical knowledge—but there are alternatives that are worse in the world," Everman said, and added that he had done nothing as a soldier that compromised his ethics. It was suggested that perhaps the playwright, Gregory Burke, was developing the artistic aspect of his persona, and had yet to progress to the warrior aspect. "If he did that, he might have written a different story," Everman replied, in an answer that was both philosophical and artful, and which deployed the very special force of tact.

—*Rebecca Mead*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
EVERYONE'S WATCHING

When people talk about the ongoing tumult in the stock market, they typically blame investors' lack of information. There's the uncertainty about the future state of the economy. There's the confusion about what the government will do next with its ever-changing bailout program. And there's the mystery of what the mortgage-backed securities clogging bank balance sheets are really worth. Yet, even with all these lurking unknowns, investors have far more information today than ever before. Your ordinary day trader, if any of those still exist, enjoys far greater access to economic and market data than men like J. P. Morgan did when they were running Wall Street. But this information isn't necessarily making investors, or the market, any smarter. In fact, what may be driving the market crazy of late is that it knows too much.

The problem isn't so much the never-ending stream of surveys, studies, and statistics—retail sales, housing prices, consumer confidence, unemployment claims, and so on. These numbers, though of varying accuracy and usefulness, at least offer a picture of what's happening in the economy—which is, in the long run, the fundamental driver of stock prices. The real problem is that investors are also deluged with another data stream; namely, all the trading information from the world's many markets, which gives them a constant, noisy, and often misleading impression of what other investors are thinking.

Investors have always paid attention to what other investors were doing, of course, but currently they're assailed by a high-volume clang of market bellwethers twenty-four hours a day. After the stock market closes in the U.S., for instance, American investors begin to look to the S.&P. futures market to figure out where prices might be headed. Then they turn to foreign markets, first in Asia and then in Europe, which often set the tone for how the U.S. stock market will open. And less well-known markets have lately had a powerful effect on how stocks behave. The Chicago Board Options Exchange has an influential index, the VIX, which is often called the "fear index," because it measures investors' expectations of market volatility. The credit-default-swap market, too, has become increasingly important in shaping the stock market. Credit-default swaps are essentially insurance bought against the possibility that a company will default. And, these days, if the price of a company's credit-default swaps rises (meaning that its chance of default is thought to be higher), its stock price will often fall.

These markets and indexes are valuable as a way to help investors hedge risk. But, in an environment of profound uncertainty, investors have a natural if troubling tendency to turn to them as horoscopes, particularly since they now get so much attention in the business press: you have only to turn on CNBC or go online to find that the Japanese market is cratering or the VIX index soaring. The result is to draw investors away from the grind of analyzing corporate performance and economic fundamentals, and to encourage pure speculation—investing as an exercise in anticipating what other investors will do. Meanwhile, traders in other markets are looking to our stock market for guidance—Nikkei traders usually react positively when the Dow rises—or, like VIX and futures traders, are overtly trying to forecast what our stock market will do. Investors find themselves trapped in a mirror maze, like the gunslingers in "The Lady from Shanghai."

All this market-watching rarely has good effects. It can easily lead to contagion, where selling in one market triggers selling in the next. It also creates interesting opportunities for manipulation. Earlier this year, when financial firms were under siege from short sellers, there was conjecture that people were buying credit-default-swap protection on companies they had shorted. That would have had the effect of driving up those companies' C.D.S. prices, which would make it look as if the C.D.S. market were seriously concerned that the companies might go bankrupt—which, in turn, would drive their stock prices down, enriching the short sellers. If short sellers weren't doing this, they were passing up free money.

Even if these ancillary markets aren't being gamed, the attention paid to them is out of all proportion to their informational worth. Because they are small relative to the elephantine U.S. stock and bond markets, it doesn't take a lot of money to move them significantly, and since they have low margin requirements, speculators can have a big impact on prices while putting up only a little cash. Credit-default-swap contracts, similarly, are generally not that expensive, so fairly small investments can move prices noticeably. When U.S. stock-market investors take their cues from these other markets, the tail is wagging the elephant.

Markets work best when investors are thinking for themselves, and tend to go awry when the obsession with what everyone else is doing becomes a dominant concern. Maybe what investors really need is to periodically take a market-information vacation. On that count, the market's recent performance may offer a small glimmer of hope: the other week, the foreign and futures markets signalled that a colossal U.S. selloff was coming, but, when the stock market opened, investors were relatively restrained in their selling. These days, a broken mirror may bring good luck.

—*James Surowiecki*

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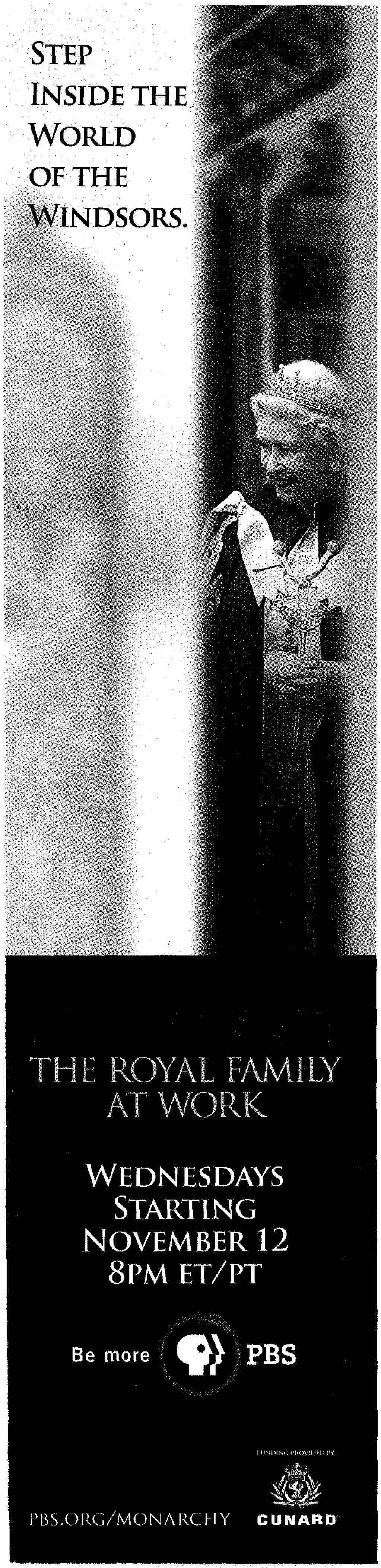

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ANNALS OF BUSINESS

THE USES OF ADVERSITY

Can underprivileged outsiders have an advantage?

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

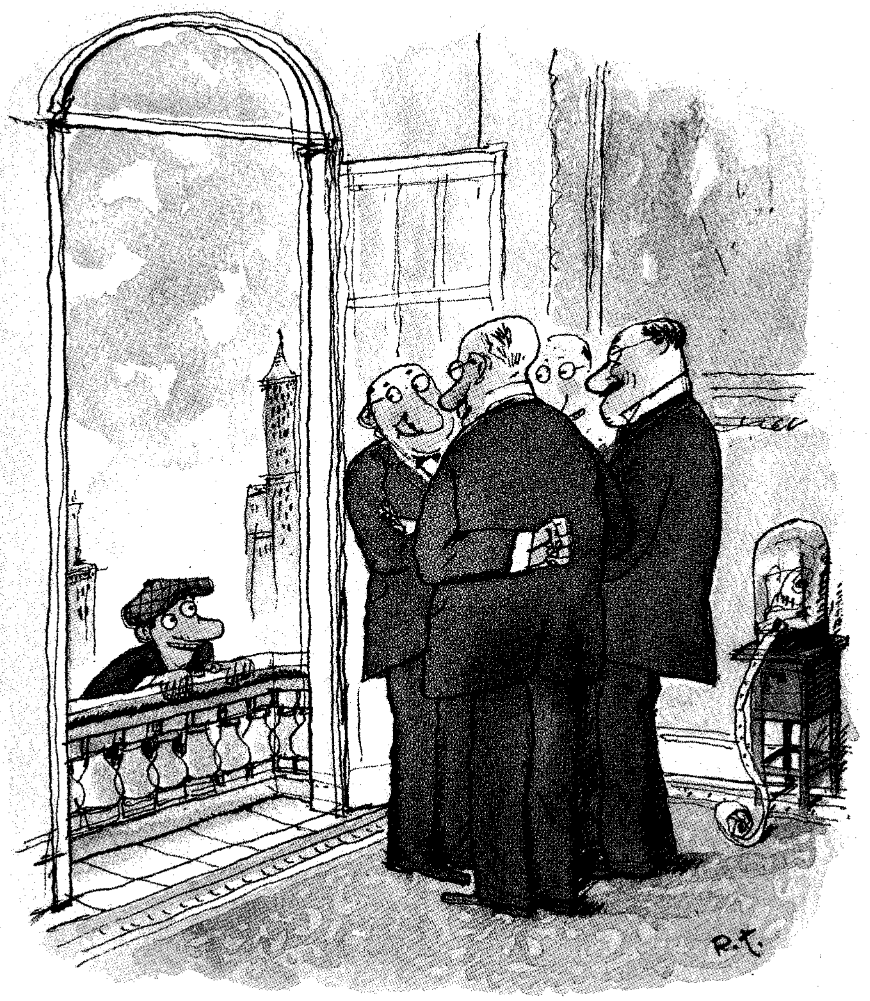
Sidney Weinberg was born in 1891, one of eleven children of Pincus Weinberg, a struggling Polish-born liquor wholesaler and bootlegger in Brooklyn. Sidney was short, a "Kewpie doll," as the *New Yorker* writer E. J. Kahn, Jr., described him, "in constant danger of being swallowed whole by executive-size chairs." He pronounced his name "Wine-boig." He left school at fifteen. He had scars on his back from knife fights in his preteen days, when he sold evening newspapers at the Hamilton Avenue terminus of the Manhattan-Brooklyn ferry.

At sixteen, he made a visit to Wall Street, keeping an eye out for a "nice-looking, tall building," as he later recalled. He picked 43 Exchange Place, where he started at the top floor and worked his way down, asking at every office, "Want a boy?" By the end of the day, he had reached the third-floor offices of a small brokerage house. There were no openings. He returned to the brokerage house the next morning. He lied that he was told to come back, and bluffed himself into a job assisting the janitor, for three dollars a week. The small brokerage house was Goldman Sachs.

From that point, Charles Ellis tells us in a new book, "The Partnership: The Making of Goldman Sachs," Weinberg's rise was inexorable. Early on, he was asked to carry a flagpole on the trolley uptown to the Sachs family's town house. The door was opened by Paul Sachs, the grandson of the firm's founder, and Sachs took a shine to him. Weinberg was soon promoted to the mailroom, which he promptly reorganized. Sachs sent him to Browne's Business College, in Brooklyn, to learn penmanship. By 1925, the firm had bought him a seat on the New York Stock Exchange. By 1927, he had made partner. By 1930, he was a senior partner, and for the next thirty-nine years—until his death, in 1969—Weinberg *was* Goldman Sachs, turning it from a floundering, mid-tier partnership into the premier investment bank in the world.

The rags-to-riches story—that staple of American biography—has over the years been given two very different interpretations. The nineteenth-century version stressed the value of compensating for disadvantage. If you wanted to end up on top, the thinking went, it was better to start at the bottom, because it was there that you learned the discipline and motivation essential for success. "New York merchants preferred to hire country boys, on the theory that they worked harder, and were more resolute, obedient, and cheerful than native New Yorkers," Irvin G. Wyllie wrote in his 1954 study "The Self-Made Man in America." Andrew Carnegie, whose personal history was the defining self-made-man narrative of the nineteenth century, insisted that there was an advantage to being "cradled, nursed and reared in the stimulating school of poverty." According to Carnegie, "It is not from the sons of the millionaire or the noble that the world receives its teachers, its martyrs, its inventors, its statesmen, its poets, or even its men of affairs. It is from the cottage of the poor that all these spring."

Today, that interpretation has been reversed. Success is seen as a matter of capitalizing on socioeconomic advantage, not compensating for disadvantage. The mechanisms of social mobility—scholarships, affirmative action, housing vouchers, Head Start—all involve attempts to convert the poor from chronic outsiders to insiders, to rescue them from what is assumed to be a hopeless state. Nowadays, we don't learn from poverty, we escape from poverty, and a book like Ellis's history of Goldman Sachs is an almost perfect case study of how we have come to believe social mobility operates. Six hundred pages of Ellis's book are devoted to the modern-day Goldman, the firm that symbolized the golden era of Wall Street. From the boom years of the nineteen-eighties through the great banking bubble of the past decade, Goldman brought impeccably credentialled members of the cognitive and socioeconomic élite to Wall Street, where they conjured up fantastically complex deals and made enormous fortunes. The opening seventy-two pages of the book, however, the chapters covering the Sidney Weinberg years, seem as though they belong to a different era. The man who created what we know as Goldman Sachs was a poor, uneducated member of a despised minority—and his story is so remarkable that perhaps only Andrew Carnegie could make sense of it.



Sidney Weinberg became a powerful banker by accentuating his humble origins.

RICHARD THOMPSON

Weinberg was not a financial wizard. His gifts were social. In his heyday, Weinberg served as a director on thirty-one corporate boards. He averaged two hundred and fifty committee or board meetings a year, and when he was not in meetings he would often take a steam at the Hotel Biltmore's Turkish baths with the likes of Robert Woodruff, of Coca-Cola, and Bernard Gimbel, of Gimbels. During the Depression, Weinberg served on Franklin Roosevelt's Business Advisory and Planning Council, and F.D.R. dubbed him the Politician, for his skill at mediating among contentious parties. He spent the war years as the vice-chairman of the War Production Board, where he was known as the Body Snatcher, because of the way he persuaded promising young business executives to join the war effort. (Weinberg seems to have been the first to realize that signing up promising young executives for public service during the war was the surest way to sign them up as clients after the war.)

When Ford Motor Company decided to go public, in the mid-nineteen-fifties, in what remains one of the world's biggest initial public offerings, both major parties in the hugely complicated transaction—the Ford family and the Ford Foundation—wanted Weinberg to represent them. He was Mr. Wall Street. "In his role as the power behind the throne," E. J. Kahn wrote in a *New Yorker* Profile of Weinberg, fifty years ago, "he probably comes as close as Bernard Baruch to embodying the popular conception of Bernard Baruch." Kahn went on:

> There is hardly a prominent corporation executive of whom he cannot—and, indeed, does not—say, "He's an intimate close personal friend of mine." . . . Industrialists who want information about other industrialists automatically turn to Weinberg, much as merchants consult credit-rating agencies. His end of many telephone conversations consists of fragments like "Who? . . . Of course I know him. *In*timately. . . . Used to be Under-Secretary of the Treasury. . . . O.K., I'll have him call you."

This gregariousness is what we expect of the head of an investment bank. Wall Street—particularly the clubby Wall Street of the early and middle part of the twentieth century—was a relationship business: you got to do the stock offering for Continental Can because you knew the head of Continental Can. We further assume that businesses based on social ties reward cultural insiders. That's one of the reasons we no longer think of poverty as being useful in the nineteenth-century sense; no matter how hard you work, or how disciplined you are, it is difficult to overcome the socially marginalizing effects of an impoverished background. In order to do the stock offering for Continental Can, you need to know the head of Continental Can, and in order to know the head of Continental Can it really helps to have been his classmate at Yale.

But Weinberg wasn't Yale. He was P.S. 13. Nor did he try to pretend that he was an insider. He did the opposite. "You'll have to make that plainer," he would say. "I'm just a dumb, uneducated kid from Brooklyn." He bought a modest house in Scarsdale in the nineteen-twenties, and lived there the rest of his life. He took the subway. He may have worked closely with the White House, but this was the Roosevelt White House, in the nineteen-thirties, at a time when none of the Old Guard on Wall Street were New Dealers. Weinberg would talk about his public school as if it were Princeton, and as a joke he would buy up Phi Beta Kappa keys from pawnshops and hand them out to visitors like party favors. His savvy was such that Roosevelt wanted to make him Ambassador to the Soviet Union, and his grasp of the intricacies of Wall Street was so shrewd that his phone never stopped ringing. But as often as he could he reminded his peers that he was from the other side of the tracks.

At one board meeting, Ellis writes, "a long presentation was being made that was overloaded with dull, detailed statistics. Number after number was read off. When the droning presenter finally paused for breath, Weinberg jumped up, waving his papers in mock triumph, to call out 'Bingo!' " The immigrant's best strategy, in the famous adage, is to think Yiddish and dress British. Weinberg thought British and dressed Yiddish.

Why did that strategy work? This is the great mystery of Weinberg's career, and it's hard to escape the conclusion that Carnegie was on to something: there are times when being an outsider is precisely what makes you a good insider. It's not difficult to imagine, for example, that the head of Continental Can *liked* the fact that Weinberg was from nothing, in the same way that New York City employers preferred country boys to city boys. That C.E.O. dwelled in a world with lots of people who went to Yale and then to Wall Street; he knew that some of them were good at what they did and some of them were just well connected, and separating the able from the incompetent wasn't always easy. Weinberg made it out of Brooklyn; how could he not be good?

Weinberg's outsiderness also allowed him to play the classic "middleman minority" role. One of the reasons that the Parsi in India, the East Asians in Africa, the Chinese in Southeast Asia, and the Lebanese in the Caribbean, among others, have been so successful, sociologists argue, is that they are decoupled from the communities in which they operate. If you are a Malaysian in Malaysia, or a Kenyan in Kenya, or an African-American in Watts, and you want to run a grocery store, you start with a handicap: you have friends and relatives who want jobs, or discounts. You can't deny credit or collect a debt from your neighbor, because he's your neighbor, and your social and business lives are tied up together. As the anthropologist Brian Foster writes of commerce in Thailand:

> A trader who was subject to the traditional social obligations and constraints would find it very difficult to run a viable business. If, for example, he were fully part of the village society and subject to the constraints of the society, he would be expected to be generous in the traditional way to those in need. It would be difficult for him to refuse credit, and it would not be possible to collect debts. . . . The inherent conflict of interest in a face-to-face market transaction would make proper etiquette impossible or would at least strain it severely, which is an important factor in Thai social relations.

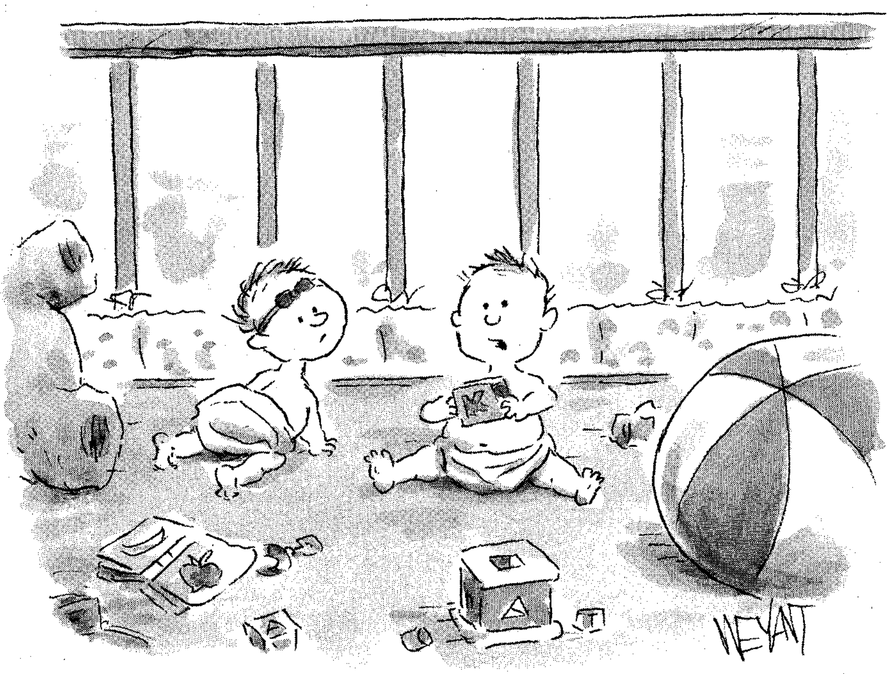
The minority has none of those constraints. He's free to keep social and financial considerations separate. He can call a bad debt a bad debt, or a bad customer a bad customer, without worrying about the social implications of his honesty.

Weinberg was decoupled from the business establishment in the same way, and that seems to have been a big part of what drew executives to him. The chairman of General Foods avowed, "Sidney is the only man I know who could ever say to me in the middle of a board meeting, as he did once, 'I don't think you're very bright,' and somehow give me the feeling that I'd been paid a compliment." That Weinberg could make a rebuke seem like a compliment is testament to his charm. That he felt free to deliver the rebuke in the first place is testament to his sociological position. You can't tell the chairman of General Foods that he's an idiot if you were his classmate at Yale. But you can if you're Pincus Weinberg's son from Brooklyn. Truthtelling is easier from a position of cultural distance.

Here is Ellis on Weinberg, again:

> Shortly after he was elected a director of General Electric, he was called upon by Philip D. Reed, GE's chairman of the board, to address a group of company officials at a banquet at the Waldorf Astoria. In presenting Weinberg, Reed said . . . that he hoped Mr. Weinberg felt, as he felt, that GE was the greatest outfit in the greatest industry in the greatest country in the world. Weinberg got to his feet. "I'll string along with your chairman about this being the greatest country," he began. "And I guess I'll even buy that part about the electrical industry. But as to GE's being the greatest business in the field, why, I'm damned if I'll commit myself until I've had a look-see." Then he sat down to vigorous applause.

At G.E., Weinberg's irreverence was cherished. During the Second World War, a top Vichy official, Admiral Jean-François Darlan, visited the White House. Darlan was classic French military, imperious and en-



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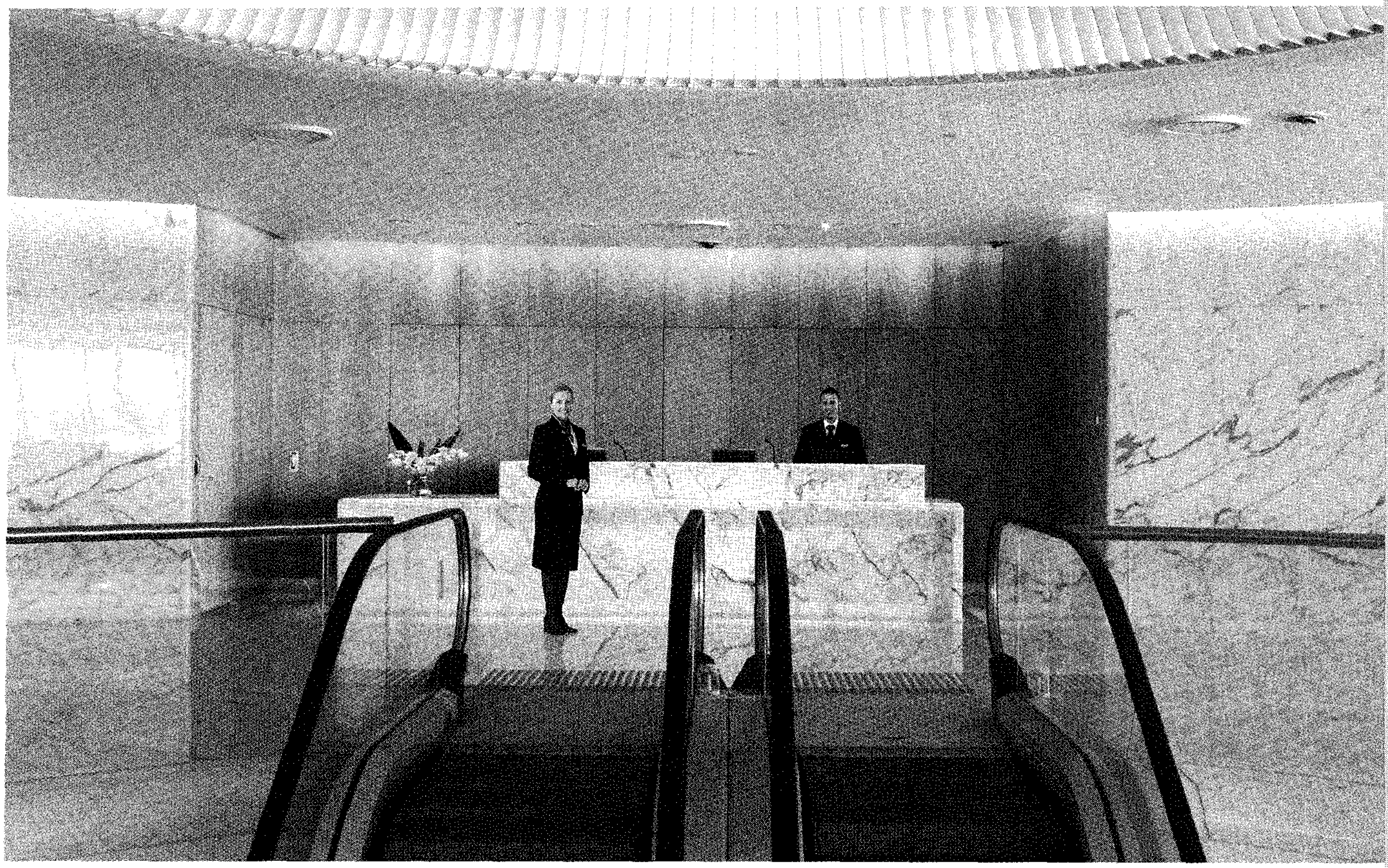

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titled, and was thought to have Nazi sympathies. Protocol dictated that the Allies treat Darlan with civility, and everyone did—save for Weinberg. The outsider felt perfectly free to say what everyone else wanted to but could not, and in so doing surely endeared himself to the whole room. "When it was time to leave," Ellis writes, "Weinberg reached into his pocket as he came to the front door, pulled out a quarter, and handed it to the resplendently uniformed admiral, saying, 'Here, boy, get me a cab.' "

The idea that outsiders can profit by virtue of their outsiderness runs contrary to our understanding of minorities. "Think Yiddish, dress British" presumes that the outsider is better off cloaking his differences. But there are clearly also times and places where minorities benefit by asserting and even exaggerating their otherness. The Berkeley historian Yuri Slezkine argues, in "The Jewish Century" (2004), that Yiddish did not evolve typically: if you study its form and structure, you discover its deliberate and fundamental artificiality—it is the language of people who are interested, in Slezkine's words, in "the maintenance of difference, the conscious preservation of the self and thus of strangeness."

Similarly, in field work in a Malaysian village, the anthropologist L. A. Peter Gosling observed a Chinese shopkeeper who

> appeared to be considerably acculturated to Malay culture, and was scrupulously sensitive to Malays in every way, including the normal wearing of a sarong, quiet and polite Malay speech, and a humble and affable manner. However, at harvest time when he would go to the field to collect crops on which he had advanced credit, he would put on his Chinese costume of shorts and undershirt, and speak in a much more abrupt fashion, acting, as one Malay farmer put it, "just like a Chinese." This behavior was to insure that he would not be treated like a fellow Malay who might be expected to be more generous on price or credit terms.

Is this what Weinberg was up to with his constant references to P.S. 13? Ellis's book repeats stories about Weinberg from Lisa Endlich's 1999 history, "Goldman Sachs: The Culture of Success," which in turn repeats stories about Weinberg from Kahn's Profile, which in turn—one imagines—repeats stories honed by Weinberg and his friends over the years. And what is clear when you read those stories is how obviously they are *stories:* anecdotes clearly constructed for strategic effect. According to Ellis:

> A friend told of Weinberg's being the guest of honor at J. P. Morgan's luncheon table, where the following exchange occurred: "Mr. Weinberg, I presume you served in the last war?"
>
> "Yes, sir, I was in the war—in the navy."
>
> "What were you in the navy?"
>
> "Cook, Second Class."
>
> Morgan was delighted.

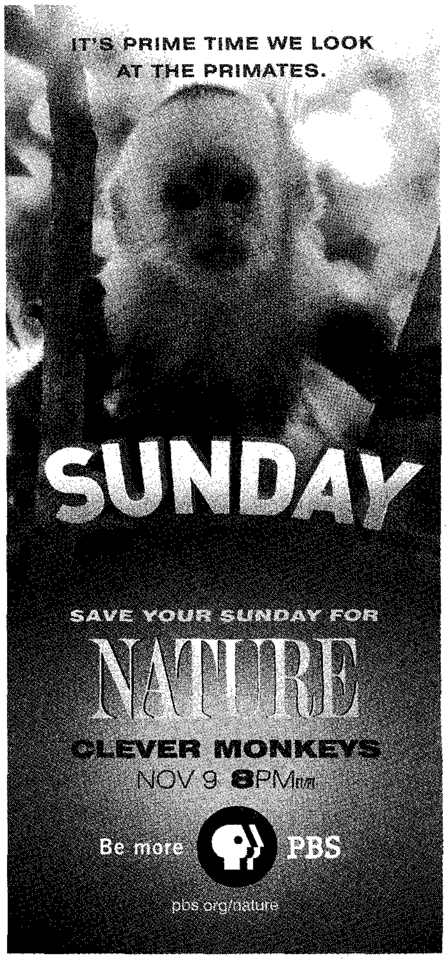
Of course, J. P. Morgan wasn't actually delighted. He died in 1913, before the First World War started. So he wasn't the mogul at the table. But you can understand why Weinberg would want to pretend that he was. And although Weinberg did a stint as a cook (on account of poor eyesight), he quickly got himself transferred to the Office of Naval Intelligence, and then spent most of the war heading up the inspection of all vessels using the port of Norfolk. But you can understand why that little bit of additional history doesn't fit, either.

Here's another one:

> The heir to a large retailing fortune once spent a night in Scarsdale with the Weinbergs and retired early. After Weinberg and his wife, whose only servant was a cook, had emptied the ashtrays and picked up the glasses, they noticed that their guest had put his suit and shoes outside his bedroom door. Amused, Weinberg took the suit and shoes down to the kitchen, cleaned the shoes, brushed the suit, and put them back. The following day, as the guest was leaving, he handed Weinberg a five dollar bill and asked him to pass it along to the butler who had taken such excellent care of things. Weinberg thanked him gravely and pocketed the money.

Let's see: we're supposed to believe that the retailing heir has dinner at the modest Weinberg residence in Scarsdale and never once sees a butler, and doesn't see a butler in the morning, either, and yet somehow remains convinced that there's a butler around. Did he imagine the butler was hiding in a closet? No matter. This is another of those stories which Weinberg needed to tell, and his audience needed to hear.

It's one thing to argue that being an outsider can be strategically useful. But Andrew Carnegie went farther. He believed that poverty provided a better preparation for success than wealth did; that, at root, compensating for disad-



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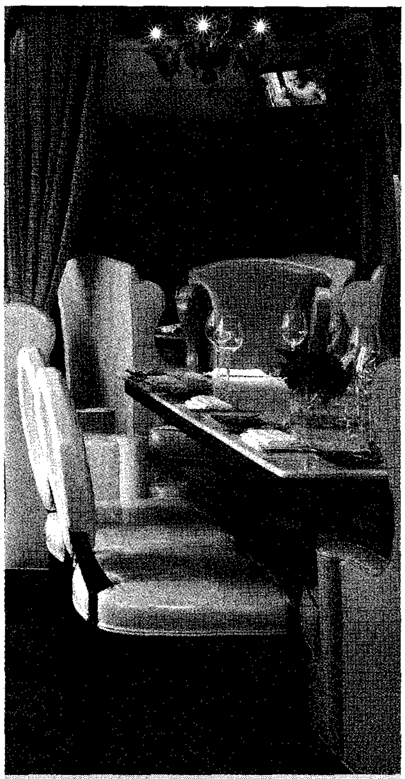

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vantage was more useful, developmentally, than capitalizing on advantage.

This idea is both familiar and perplexing. Consider the curious fact that many successful entrepreneurs suffer from serious learning disabilities. Paul Orfalea, the founder of the Kinko's chain, was a D student who failed two grades, was expelled from four schools, and graduated at the bottom of his high-school class. "In third grade, the only word I could read was 'the,' " he says. "I used to keep track of where the group was reading by following from one 'the' to the next." Richard Branson, the British billionaire who started the Virgin empire, dropped out of school at fifteen after struggling with reading and writing. "I was always bottom of the class," he has said. John Chambers, who built the Silicon Valley firm Cisco into a hundred-billion-dollar corporation, has trouble reading e-mail. One of the pioneers of the cellular-phone industry, Craig McCaw, is dyslexic, as is Charles Schwab, the founder of the discount brokerage house that bears his name. When the business-school professor Julie Logan surveyed a group of American small-business owners recently, she found that thirty-five per cent of them self-identified as dyslexic.

That is a remarkable statistic. Dyslexia affects the very skills that lie at the center of an individual's ability to manage the modern world. Yet Schwab and Orfalea and Chambers and Branson seem to have made up for their disabilities, in the same way that the poor, in Carnegie's view, can make up for their poverty. Because of their difficulties with reading and writing, they were forced to develop superior oral-communication and problem-solving skills. Because they had to rely on others to help them navigate the written word, they became adept at delegating authority. In one study, conducted in Britain, eighty per cent of dyslexic entrepreneurs were found to have held the position of captain in a high-school sport, versus twenty-seven per cent of non-dyslexic entrepreneurs. They compensated for their academic shortcomings by developing superior social skills, and, when they reached the workplace, those compensatory skills gave them an enormous head start. "I didn't have a lot of self-confidence as a kid," Orfalea said once, in an interview. "And that is for the good. If you have a healthy dose of rejection in your life, you are going to have to figure out how to do it your way."

There's no question that we are less than comfortable with the claims that people like Schwab and Orfalea make on behalf of their disabilities. As impressive as their success has been, none of us would go so far as to wish dyslexia on our own children. If a disproportionately high number of entrepreneurs are dyslexic, so are a disproportionately high number of prisoners. Systems in which people compensate for disadvantage seem to us unacceptably Darwinian. The stronger get stronger, and the weaker get even weaker. The man who boasts of walking seven miles to school, barefoot, every morning, happily drives his own grandchildren ten blocks in an S.U.V. We have become convinced that the surest path to success for our children involves providing them with a carefully optimized educational experience: the "best" schools, the most highly educated teachers, the smallest classrooms, the shiniest facilities, the greatest variety of colors in the art-room paint box. But one need only look at countries where schoolchildren outperform their American counterparts—despite larger classes, shabbier schools, and smaller budgets—to wonder if our wholesale embrace of the advantages of advantages isn't as simplistic as Carnegie's wholesale embrace of the advantages of disadvantages.

In E. J. Kahn's Profile, he tells the story of a C.E.O. retreat that Weinberg attended, organized by Averell Harriman. It was at Sun Valley, Harriman's ski resort, where, Kahn writes, it emerged that Weinberg had never skied before:

> Several corporation presidents pooled their cash resources to bet him twenty-five dollars that he could not ski down the steepest and longest slope in the area. Weinberg was approaching fifty but game. "I got hold of an instructor named Franz Something or Fritz Something and had a thirty minute lesson," he says. "Then I rode up to the top of the mountain. It took me half a day to come down, and I finished with only one ski, and for two weeks I was black and blue all over, but I won the bet."

Here you have the Waspy élite of corporate America, off in their mountain idyll, subjecting the little Jew from Brooklyn to a bit of boarding-school hazing. (In a reminder of the anti-Semitism permeating Weinberg's world, Ellis tells us that, in the Depression, Manufacturers Trust, a predominantly Jewish company, had to agree to install a Gentile as C.E.O. as a condition of being rescued by a coalition of banks.) It is also possible, though, to read that story as highlighting the determination of the Brooklyn kid who'll be damned if he's going to let himself lose a bet to those smirking C.E.O.s. One imagines that Weinberg told that tale the first way to his wife, and the second way to his buddies in the Biltmore steam room. And when he tried to get out of bed the next morning it probably occurred to him that sometimes being humiliated provides a pretty good opportunity to show a lodge full of potential clients that you would ski down a mountain for them.

Twenty years later, Weinberg had his greatest score, handling the initial public offering for Ford Motor Company, which was founded, of course, by that odious anti-Semite Henry Ford. Did taking the business prick Weinberg's conscience? Maybe so. But he probably realized that the unstated premise behind the idea that the Jews control all the banks is that Jews are really good bankers. The first was a stereotype that oppressed; the second was a stereotype that, if you were smart about it, you could use to win a few clients. If you're trying to build an empire, you work with what you have.

In 1918, Henry Goldman, one of the senior partners of Goldman Sachs, quit the firm in a dispute over Liberty Bonds. Goldman was a Germanophile, who objected to aiding the Allied war effort. (This is the same Henry Goldman who later bought the twelve-year-old Yehudi Menuhin a Stradivarius and Albert Einstein a yacht.) The Sachs brothers—Walter and Arthur—were desperate for a replacement, and they settled, finally, on a young man named Waddill Catchings, a close friend of Arthur Sachs from Harvard. He had worked at Sullivan & Cromwell, Wall Street's great patrician law firm. He had industrial experience, having reorganized several companies, and "on top of all that," Ellis tells us, "Catchings was one of the most talented, charming, handsome, well-educated, and upwardly mobile people in Wall Street."

Catchings's bold idea was to create a huge investment trust, called the Goldman Sachs Trading Corporation. It was a precursor to today's hedge funds; it borrowed heavily to buy controlling stakes in groups of corporations. The fund was originally intended to be twenty-five million dollars, but then Catchings, swept up in the boom market of the nineteen-twenties, doubled it to fifty million, doubled it again to a hundred million, then merged the Goldman fund with another fund and added two subsidiary trusts, until G.S.T.C. controlled half a billion dollars in assets.

"Walter and Arthur Sachs were travelling in Europe during the summer of 1929," Ellis writes. "In Italy they learned of the deals Catchings was doing on his own, and Walter Sachs got worried. On his return to New York, he went straight to Catchings' apartment in the Plaza Hotel to urge greater caution. But Catchings, still caught up in the bull-market euphoria, was unmoved. "The trouble with you, Walter, is that you've no imagination," he said.

Then came the stock-market crash. G.S.T.C. stock, which had traded as high as three hundred and twenty-six dollars a share, fell to $1.75. Goldman's capital was wiped out. The firm was besieged with lawsuits, the last of which was not settled until 1968. Eddie Cantor—one of the most popular comedians of the day and a disgruntled G.S.T.C. investor—turned the respected Goldman name into a punch line: "They told me to buy the stock for my old age . . . and it worked *perfectly*. Within six months I felt like a *very* old man!" Catchings was ousted. "Very few men can stand success," Walter Sachs concluded. "He was not one of them." Privilege did not prepare Catchings for crisis. The Sachs brothers then replaced Catchings with a man who was not from privilege at all, and perhaps now we can appreciate the wisdom of that decision. Wall Street needs a few less Waddill Catchingses and a few more Sidney Weinbergs. ♦

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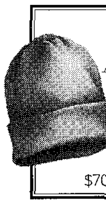
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SHOUTS & MURMURS

THINK HARD, IT'LL COME BACK TO YOU

BY WOODY ALLEN

As health-food stores go, the Hardened Artery is as steady as any. Perusing its pricey nutrients last week in quest of some vitalizing herb or root to flush out a family of free radicals that had built their nest in my chassis, I came vis-à-vis a bottle of red fluid nestled like a krait between the ginseng and the echinacea and sporting the Ray Bradburyish title "Brainiac." Plucked from its niche, it claimed to be a thirst quencher chockablock with gingko biloba and sundry antioxidants reputed to enhance memory. "Think quick," the label copy spieled. "Where are your car keys? Cue television game-show music. The mind docs at Function developed Brainiac to help in these situations." On the label, in letters clearly visible to anyone possessing an electron microscope, followed the sheepish admission that the claims of the miracle apéritif had not yet been examined by the Food and Drug Administration and "the product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease." Whether it might be used to remove gravy stains or unclog a drain remains untested. Still, this notion of a neuron-recharging elixir brought to mind thoughts of my esteemed colleague Murray Cipher, as he prepared to go out for dinner.

Mustn't be late to the Wasserfiends' party. Classy crowd. No lungfish caviar tonight. Upward mobility? Vice-presidency for old Murray? Imagine—twenty-four exterminators working under me. Mind-boggling. How do I look? Only great. New necktie should wow 'em, although the pattern of multiple G clefs may be too hip for the room. Searched for the perfect birthday present for Mr. Wasserfiend. Amazing, but Hammacher Schlemmer is the only place in town that carries a Jarvik Heart with a compartment for fish hooks. But, look at this, in my haste to be on time I almost bolted out the door without his gift. Let's see, where did I put it? Hmm. Was it on the foyer table? Not here in the drawer. Did I leave it in the bedroom? Check my night table—so damn cluttered. Reading lamp, alarm clock, Kleenex, shoe horn, my copy of Hui-Neng's "Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch." Glove compartment of the Saab? Better race out and see. Raining. Oh, brother, a scratch on the fender. Damn rabbi on his unicycle. Wait a minute, where are my car keys? Could have sworn I left them in this pocket. No, just some loose change and ticket stubs from the all-black version of Elaine Stritch' s one-woman show. Did I check my desk? Better go back inside. What's in the top drawer here? Hmm. Envelopes, my paper clips, a loaded revolver in case the tenant in 2A begins yodelling again. O.K., let's reconstruct. This morning I drove to Smallbone's to have my toupee steamed, stopped off at Stebbins's home to return his arch supports, then to my bagpipe lesson.

Hey, wait a minute, that little starlet I shacked up with who always took melatonin to prevent jet lag when we had sex—she used to nosh some kind of Buck Rogers health snack. Yes, Cranial Pops. Supposed to zap the memory. Could she have even left some in the cupboard? Ah, here—what does it say on the bag? "Untested by Food and Drug Administration—May cause drowsiness in men named Seymour." I'll just try a few. Hmm, nice flavor. I love the taste of soy phosphatidylserine. Have some more?

Now, where was I? Oh, yes, of course, I left Mr. Wasserfiend's gift at the office. My secretary, Miss Facework, to meet me with it at the party. Car keys in gray cashmere cardigan on second hanger in hall closet. Remember the day I bought that cardigan, sixteen years ago. A Tuesday. I was wearing beige slacks and a Sulka button-down

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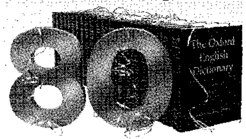

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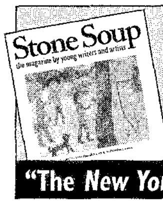

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oxford shirt. Gray socks. Shoes from Flagg Brothers. Had lunch with Sol Kashflow, the hedge-fund whiz. Sol ordered the halibut with buttered peas and julienne potatoes. His beverage white wine, a '64 Bâtard-Montrachet, which I recall was a tad fruity. Finished off with lime sorbet and two after-dinner mints—or was it three? Funny thing, he hardly touched his meal. Too excited because Amalgamated Permafrost had just merged with a company that had developed a process to make steel into henbane. To celebrate I got the check. Fifty-six dollars and ninety-eight cents. Hardly worth it, since my langoustines were overcooked.

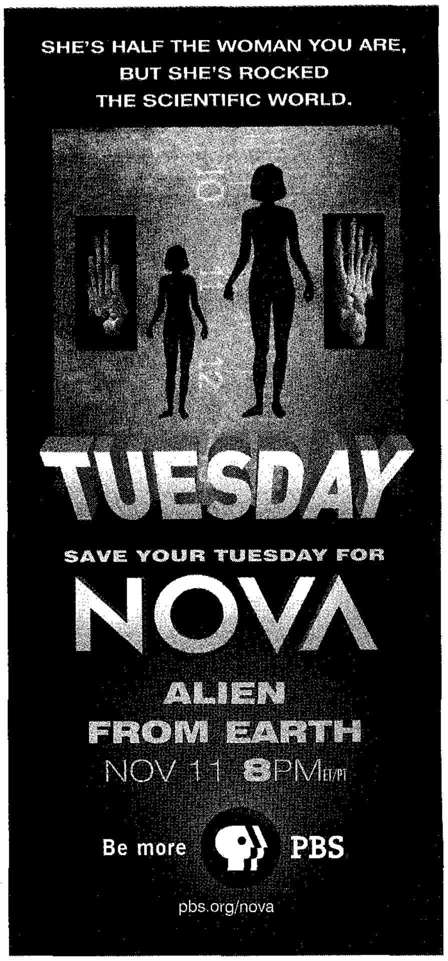
To the Wasserfiends' party at last. Just on time. Everybody well dressed. Champagne flowing. Cocktail pianist. "Avalon." Same song playing that night in Vineyard Haven with Lillian Waterfowl. Slipped out of her bathing suit. Naked goddess. Tore off my clothes with her long nails. Our two bodies straining with desire. Moved in on her like a panther. About to consummate passion, when suddenly my leg cramped. Left calf? No, right. Let out piercing shriek, leaped off her. Hopped around room, face contorted with pain. What struck her so damn funny? Christ, the woman was doubled up with laughter. Accused me of ruining the moment. Schlemiel, she called me, *nudnik*. Couldn't run to the phone fast enough to share the story with our friends. Let her rot with her embezzler husband. The man tries to hide six million dollars in small denominations in his shoe.

Brings to mind Hornblow evening. Haven't thought of it in fifteen years. Watched Effluvia Hornblow baking in her kitchen. Asa Hornblow in the other room bombinating his chums about the Red Sox. They split a doubleheader with the Tigers that day, taking the opener, 6–2, then dropping the nightcap, 4–0. Heard their voices, good old boys arguing balls and strikes. Bent her over the sink to lance my tongue between her smoldering lips. Suddenly necktie caught in the Mixmaster. Switch jammed, wouldn't turn off. Plug inaccessible behind refrigerator. Kept snapping my head against the marble backsplash. Remember witnessing birth of the great Crab Nebula. Emergency Squad. Taken away in an ambulance. For two weeks could speak only in rhymed couplets, smiled often, plus every ten minutes greased my body for a Channel swim. Hermès tie it was. Sixty-nine ninety-five, and that was then.

Look at Mrs. Wasserfiend sitting there, so elegant. Black Armani dress, simple pearls and those dramatic earrings—two Jivaro shrunken heads with their lips sewn together. Makes me think of Grandma. Always sitting there playing cards with Grandpa. Cheated him blind. Finally he went blind in one eye and she could only cheat half of him. Grandpa very brilliant, spent fifteen years translating "Anna Karenina" into pig Latin. Remember the day Grandpa collapsed, June 8th, 6:16 P.M. Misdiagnosed as dead and embalmed despite his clear ability to shimmy and sing "Rag Mop." Grandma sold the house and devoted her life to serving God. Applied for sainthood but was turned down because she couldn't parallel park.

Pianist is playing "You Made Me Love You." Remember always hearing that song when Mom was pregnant with me. Dad used to sing it to himself in the mirror all day long. Recall Mom giving birth to me in a taxicab. Meter ran four-eighty. Cabbie was Israel Moscowitz. Talkative. Referred to his wife as a fat pot of kasha. Remember my parents expected twins. Crushed when there was only one of me. Couldn't deal with it. First few years dressed me as twins. Two hats, four shoes. To this day they still inquire about Chester.

Thank you for a wonderful evening, Mrs. Wasserfiend. Oh, and the name you were trying to think of when we were discussing the life of Emily Dickinson before was Bronko Nagurski. Out of there just in time. Cranial Pops starting to wear off. Still, no question I was the hit of the party. Came up with Gouda cheese. Lava soap. Got Leo Gorcey and Julien Sorel. Managed to recite the Philippics verbatim. Recalled the Schrafft's on Fifty-seventh and Third. Hummed Mousie Powell's theme song. Got Menachem Schneerson, the Sons of the Pioneers. Gyp the Blood. Now, where the hell did I park my car? ♦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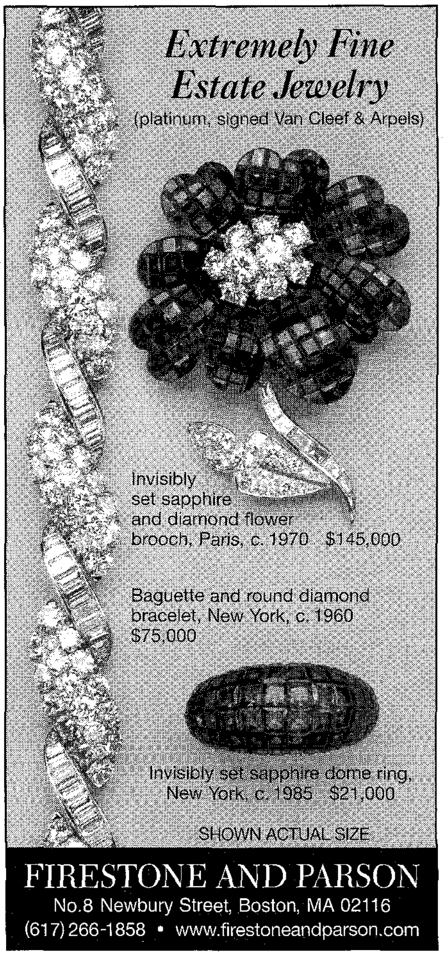
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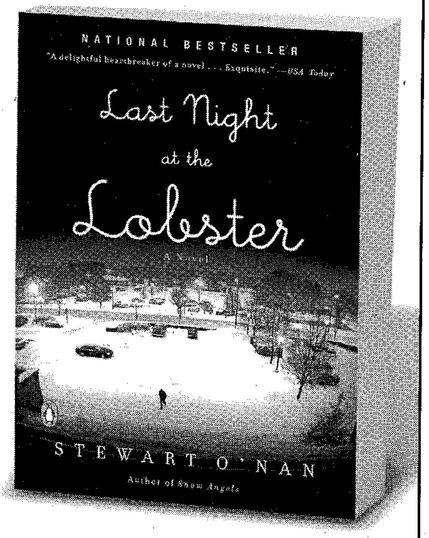
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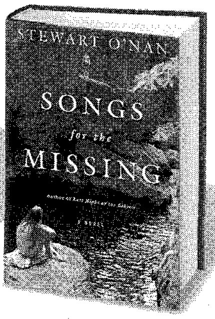

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LETTER FROM MEXICO

DAYS OF THE DEAD

The new narcocultura.

BY ALMA GUILLERMOPRIETO

Last May, an exhibit sponsored by the government of the Mexican state of Sinaloa compelled civic leaders in Culiacán, the capital, to denounce the artist Rosa María Robles and demand that the show be closed down. Comments left in the visitors' book weren't as harsh. After wandering aghast through installations that featured bloodied toilets and suspended children's outfits pierced by dried cow tongues or long, knobby rubber penises, viewers wrote things like "It gave me nausea, but it made me think" and "This was very hard; it made me want to cry." A few even thanked Robles for the exhibit.

Sometimes a black boot was displayed in the act of shattering an ostrich egg. Not every viewer may have understood that this was the artist's way of critiquing the macho *narcotraficante* culture of her native state, which has brought with it uncounted acts of violence, including hundreds of murders each year. But many did understand: people in Sinaloa know that *los narcos* actually wear those absurd boots—most fashionably made of ostrich leather—and in these hard times every day brings news of more lives they have shattered. And even a clueless outsider could grasp the meaning of the exhibit's most controversial and memorable installation, referred to in the catalogue as "Red Carpet." It was pieced together from the heavy woollen blankets typical of the Sinaloa mountain region, which, in the exhibit, were stiff with dried blood. Everyone in Sinaloa knows by now that in the wave of drug-related murders some of the most notorious victims have been the *levantados*, or pickups: cops or police chiefs or traffickers who are kidnapped, and whose mutilated corpses, wrapped in blankets, appear later. Rosa María Robles had somehow managed to obtain some of the blood-soaked blankets that had been used in such murders, but after the show opened state investigative police confiscated the blankets, on the ground that they are legal evidence.

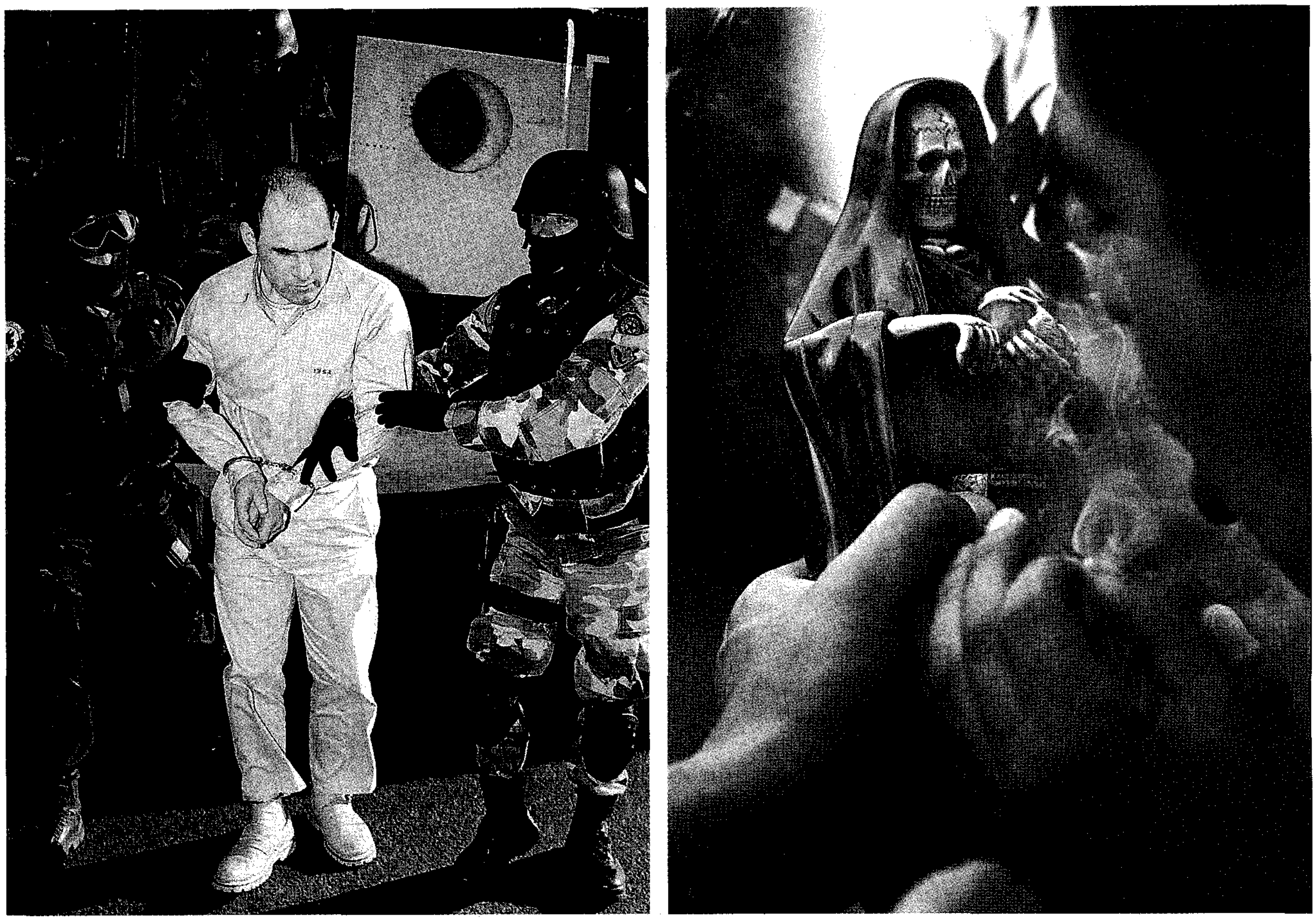
Robles, a tiny, wiry, loquacious woman who wears tight jeans and clingy tops, has spent most of her life in Culiacán. In the mid-nineties, she earned a respectable reputation crafting enormous, menhir-like monuments from tree trunks that fetched up on the banks of a river that runs through the city. Her artistic concerns at the time, she told me, were mainly ecological. In 2006, her work took a different turn when, in a sort of trance, she began assembling the exhibit she called "Navajas" ("Razors"). The various installation pieces came together quickly "and without stumbling," she said one afternoon in her home, a sparsely furnished rented house in a dusty neighborhood on the outskirts of the city.

"They ask me why I want to give this negative image of Sinaloa," she said. "But I don't. The image is already there. 'Razors' is about violence, but it calls for a reflection about the signs of decadence that surround us."

"Razors" is both raw and stagy, and overwhelming in a way that does not really play fair with the viewer. Indeed, Robles could be accused of trafficking in the same kind of bloody one-upmanship that the drug trade is currently engaged in. (When the authorities confiscated the bloody blankets, she cut one of her veins, collected the blood in a chamber pot, and painted a new set of blankets with it.) But, in her messy response to the mayhem around her, Robles, like many Mexicans who watched indifferently as the drug terror developed over the decades, is only just learning how to react to it.

Sinaloa lies on the Pacific Ocean, six hundred and fifty miles south of the United States border. There is a significant fishing industry, some tourism along the coast, a fertile valley around Culiacán (in which a good portion of all the tomatoes, eggplants, and melons consumed in the

United States is grown), and, east of this, a scraggly, steep, and serrated mountain range. This is the Sierra Madre Occidental; few paved roads wind along these mountains. Cannabis grows widely in the region. During the dry season, the sierra is parched; when the rains come, it bursts into life long enough for a poppy crop to bloom, leaving behind fields of round green pods heavy with narcotic milk. Spraying crops that grow at such a steep incline is difficult; persuading smallholders to eradicate a crop that offers prosperity and has been a way of life for decades is almost always impossible. Given the conditions, there is nothing surprising about the persistence of a clandestine drug trade in the region. What is unusual, perhaps, is how wrong things had to go before anyone paid attention.


Osiel Cárdenas, who is now awaiting trial in the United States; the Holy Death cult draws devotees from the drug trade.

LEFT: REUTERS/LANDOV; RIGHT: JOSE CARLO GONZÁLEZ/LA JORNADA

In Sinaloa, Javier Valdez Cárdenas, a reporter, columnist, and editor for the scrappy local newspaper *Río Doce*, is an exception to the general indifference. Having for years made it his business to know a great deal about drug issues, he is a mandatory stop for Mexican and foreign journalists trying to figure out the Culiacán drug scene. Valdez is about forty, stocky, swarthy, and graying, but there is something of the cocky teenager in his manner. We had lunch on a scorching Culiacán afternoon, and he recited with studied weariness the stages of his home state's emergence as the crucible of Mexico's drug crisis. It was in the late nineteenth century, he said, that the opium harvest first became visible, encouraged by the arrival of Chinese immigrants who had come to build a railroad. There was, he added, the long-standing local use of marijuana, particularly by Mexican soldiers, who got through the useless hours of patrol and guard duty with the help of a spliff or two. There was the almost certainly apocryphal—but nevertheless widely believed—story that during the Second World War the United States urged Sinaloa to boost its (illegal) production of opium in order to meet the medical needs of G.I.s wounded in combat. There was, for real, the gigantic marijuana boom in the nineteen-sixties, fuelled by demand in the United States. And, Valdez noted, there was the notable decline in illegal crop harvests in the late seventies, as the result of a series of violent and ambitious assaults on growers carried out by the Mexican federal police with the support of the Mexican Army, and with the energetic encouragement of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration.

"That was when the drug trade really began to expand," Valdez said. "Because the few traffickers who remained here were killed, but all the rest of them emigrated. Now they're all over the country."

Forty years after Operación Intercepción—which was followed by Operación Cooperación, Operación Cóndor, and other drug-war initiatives—as much as thirty per cent of Mexico's arable land is suspected of being under cultivation for clandestine crops, drug violence in Sinaloa has taken a quantitatively different turn, and the Sinaloa traffickers have generated entire dynasties of criminals who are at war in nearly every one of Mexico's thirty-one states, as well as Mexico City.

The exiles who left Sinaloa for Tijuana, Guadalajara, and Ciudad Juárez in the nineteen-seventies included members of the Arellano Félix family; a bold operator called Joaquín Guzmán; and a schemer with a talent for international relations, Amado Carrillo. They and their elders spent the next two decades collaborating with Colombia's drug kings on clandestine routes for delivering cocaine and marijuana to the United States. Beginning in the mid-nineties, after Pablo Escobar was killed and his main rivals were arrested, the Mexican associates assumed their rightful position in the global drug economy. The main access points to what is by far the largest market for drugs in the world are, after all, in Mexico. By the turn of the millennium, Mexico was exporting heroin and marijuana, transporting the majority of Colombian cocaine, and collaborating with Chinese traders in the production and export of methamphetamines. The Sinaloa traffickers, who had not necessarily remained friends, controlled access to all the major border points, with the exception of the ones in the Gulf Coast state of Tamaulipas. Those, the government believes, were the domain of Osiel Cárdenas, a particularly violent local trafficker.

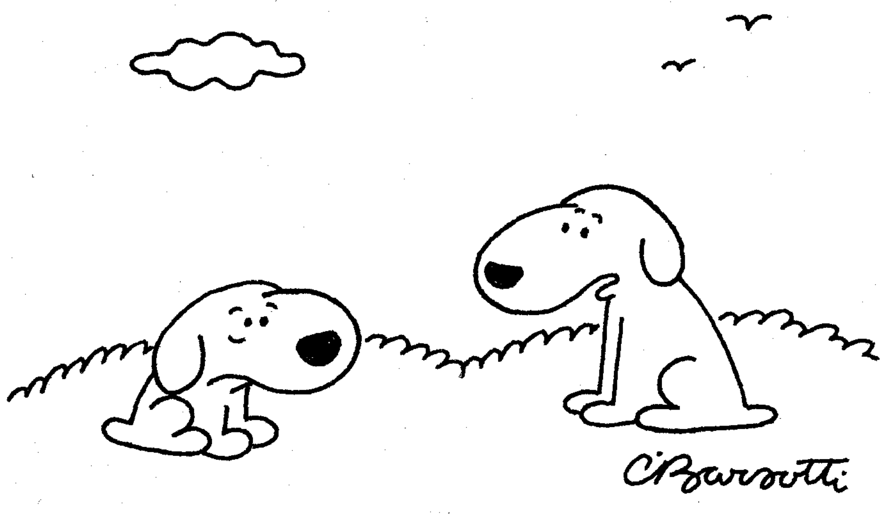
With its key border cities of Nuevo Laredo (on the other side of the Rio Grande from Laredo) and Matamoros (across from Brownsville), the state of Tamaulipas is a coveted prize that Osiel Cárdenas's former associates now control. They are, for the most part, ex-members of an élite Army antinarcotics unit, operating under the code name los Zetas, and they have drastically upped the ante on all forms of violence; the practice of beheading their victims is one of their signal contributions to the drug trade.

Drug careers tend not to last very long: Osiel Cárdenas has been awaiting trial in the United States for nearly two years, since pleading innocent in February, 2007. Three of the Arellano Félix brothers, who operated out of Tijuana, are dead or in jail, and one was arrested last week. The most skillful trafficker of them all, Amado Carrillo, who once had a fleet of jets to ferry his goods from his base in Ciudad Juárez, and who liked to be called the Lord of the Skies, is also gone. In 1997, having decided to move his business to South America and set up housekeeping in Buenos Aires, he went to Mexico City for radical liposuction and facial renovation. He died in the recovery room, from a fatal mix of anesthetics and sleeping potion, according to newspapers at the time. (His attending physicians died as well, discovered months later encased in cement.)

The most visible member of the exile generation of drug traffickers still at large is Joaquín Guzmán, commonly known as El Chapo (a Sinaloan term for men who are short and built like refrigerators). It is said by people in Sinaloa that, seven years after El Chapo escaped from prison in a laundry cart and rose to the top of law enforcers' most-wanted lists (and an unspecified amount of time since he acquired a jet plane that, according to some reports, was once used by the C.I.A. for rendition flights), he still throws parties at his ranch in the Sinaloa hill country. It is said that he recently closed down a restaurant in Culiacán, confiscating the other diners' cell phones until he and his friends had finished their meal (and paid handsomely for the meals of his hostages as well), and that, at a wake in Culiacán in May, some of El Chapo's men showed up to ask if the bereaved family would move, at no further cost, to a more elegant parlor at another location. When the family complied, the body of Joaquín Guzmán's hulking son, Edgar, who had been shot down outside a shopping mall, was brought in. And it is said that the street was then closed off so that El Chapo could weep over his murdered child in privacy.

Those are the stories. What is certain is that the campaign that has filled Mexican life with daily news of vicious crime—torture, kidnappings, beheadings—is being fought by Chapo Guzmán against his former allies. These include, first of all, the Beltrán Leyva family, which allegedly ordered the murder of Edgar and which, it was reported last week, may have infiltrated the U.S. Embassy in Mexico. But Guzmán is also locked in combat with the remaining members of the Arellano Félix drug clan, in Tijuana; with the brother of the plastic-surgery victim Amado Carrillo; and, above all, with the heirs of the Gulf Coast empire created by the extradited Osiel Cárdenas. The fight is over drug routes, particularly those that end in Tamaulipas and serve as access points to the United States, and over profitable illicit local businesses like prostitution and the smuggling of illegal immigrants. Included in the territorial bounty is the right to control an unknown number of the police and the military—cops and commanders both—who moonlight as the traffickers' henchmen.

Since Edgar's murder, there has been a surge in drug-related killings throughout the country. Nearly four thousand people have died so far this year. Sometimes the corpses are wrapped in the kinds of woollen blankets that Robles used for her "Red Carpet." Sometimes the victims are beheaded. The bodies



"I'm sure they won't be eating _all_ the dog food."

often show signs of torture. Javier Valdez, the journalist who monitors these matters, notes that the murder of Guzmán's son signalled the beginning of a new type of war. "Before that death, they hadn't messed with each other's families," and killings were highly targeted, he said. "*Ahora va a estar más cabrón*" ("Now the shit is going to hit the fan"). He suggested that I visit one of Culiacán's newest cemeteries.

The cemetery has grown at a staid pace during the past forty years, but it seemed to me that now it could hardly keep up with demand. By eight o'clock that morning, earthmovers were digging up new sections. Some workers were laying in a honeycomb of new graves; others labored over an enormous new mausoleum. A man who has known the cemetery over a long period of time, and proved to be gregarious and helpful in the local way, provided a statistic: thirty per cent of the graveyard's permanent residents had met a violent end. By and large, he said, they were up-country farmers, who got rich very quickly and died suddenly. The new mausoleums reflected the tension between the relatives' need to mourn and their Sinaloan impulse to show off. No excess was too excessive, no preconceived notion of what a burying ground might contain stood in the way of creativity. Next to a massive black marble monument, with carved-stone columns and a chapel large enough to accommodate several rows of plastic chairs, one might turn to face an orange two-story affair with a cupola, a bell tower, balconies, and aluminum-frame windows that handsomely achieved a Fiesta Inn effect. Banners with portraits of the jowly, shirtsleeved deceased hung from the crenellated wall of another. A child's shrine was covered with a mural of SpongeBob SquarePants. A modernist structure was crowned with a Pei-like crystal pyramid, encasing for all eternity a silver heart-shaped helium balloon.

"What the families want," the man said, "is for their mausoleum to demonstrate the power they have over things." Photographs of the departed showed bullish, thick-necked men in their mid-twenties or thirties, looking bored and dangerous, wearing bluejeans and extravagantly pointy ostrich-skin boots. In this boastful arena, the pictures had also been

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carefully chosen to show the dead man at his best. He frequently appeared on a chapel's altar, unsmiling and surrounded by many bottles of whiskey, or perhaps even more bottles of beer; the implicit epitaph of the deceased was this: he could drink anybody under the table.

Felipe Calderón, a member by family tradition of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), took over as his party's second President of the current era in December of 2006, following seventy years of uncontested rule by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI. Calderón's election was contested, and he was perceived by much of the electorate as a weak leader. The need to overcome this impression may have been a factor in his decision, almost immediately upon taking office, to involve the military in renewed combat against the drug trade—a fight that his predecessor, Vicente Fox, had less visibly pursued. The sight of troops patrolling the major arteries of cities like Ciudad Juárez and Morelia in armored cars has generated enormous local resentment, and offers vast opportunities for corruption in a military that, compared with the security forces, is not loathed, and remains—if only in the most relative terms—uncorrupt. (Among the many exceptions is an Army general who was removed as drug czar some years ago, when it was discovered that he was actually working for the Juárez drug trade.) Regardless, troops are now deployed across the country, resulting in mounting tension between the local security forces and the federal troops. Quite a few high-level arrests have been made, but drug crimes have increased wherever the troops patrol, a consequence of what several people I talked to described as "stirring up the chicken coop." A certain nostalgia for the days when the PRI was in charge and the drug traffickers knew their place would have been unthinkable a couple of years ago, but it has encouraged old PRIistas to believe that the party can return to power in the 2012 elections.

In large part, though, it was the PRI's defeat—or, rather, the long-withheld recognition of its defeat—and the dawn of real electoral politics that led to what appears to be the drug trade's thorough infiltration of the political parties. This last according to a PRIista whom I shall call Héctor, who enjoyed a long and successful national career before retiring to his home state. In the old days, much of the money for what was essentially a ceremonial presentation of the candidate to his subjects came from the vast coffers of the one-party state. Modern media campaigns put an end to all that. "Thanks to the television stations, our campaign needs multiplied," Héctor explained. "A congressman's electoral campaign can now run to sixteen, seventeen million dollars." Where is such money to come from? Informed opinion has it that each of the major drug groups now has ties to significant numbers of politicians in its party of choice, if not to the party itself. As for the current military offensive, Héctor gave a little snort of disgust. "When you see what amounts to a military parade in these towns, in which the Army is trooping along on the main avenue while on the side streets people are killing each other . . . when I see how these people"—the traffickers—"are climbing up right into the very beard of the state, I think, Holy fuck! This country could really collapse!"

There are limits on the way the government can wage its war on drugs. A government spokesman, Miguel Monterrubio, pointed out recently that when President Calderón came to office there were ten thousand federal law-enforcement agents in the entire country. Today, the total has increased to nearly

FROM THIS TO THAT

Stepping overboard from the dream-laden vessel of sleep—
its cargo of foreign tongues, sunsplit stones of Italy, one
colored bundle of kindlewood, and the music of God knows who
played on the French horn by the poet's only daughter—

you walk awhile by the actual tide-line, the ocean drawn back
to expose sea rocks colonized by purple-painted tribes
of young mussels, where three oystercatchers grown hysterical
at the frightful sight of you leave their lethal business

among the molluscs and flap-flee over the waves in baffling
blackwhitewhiteblack Escher flashes. You attend, then,
to the lime-green toupees of weed the near rocks wear, take in
the shoreline glint of scabious and coltsfoot, the quick ignitions

of a few leftover leaves of pink thrift, see one short-masted
black trawler riding the waves, and spot the head
and periscoped neck of a cormorant as it vanishes
between breaths, reappears, and looks about as if surprised

to find the world as is—sky, sea, the rugged bulk of Mweelrea
keeping one from the other—as you yourself look about, minding
the seabird's amphibian gift to live underwater and in air,
to stand on its isolate perch in the wingspread very image

of a black phoenix rising. So stumble on to true wakefulness,
all dreams dissipated, and stop silenced on a seal-smooth rock
half-buried in sand, knowing nothing but the burden of
what you've seen, weighing the simple specific gravity of it,

the jag-line leading from this to that, before you turn for home.

—*Eamon Grennan*

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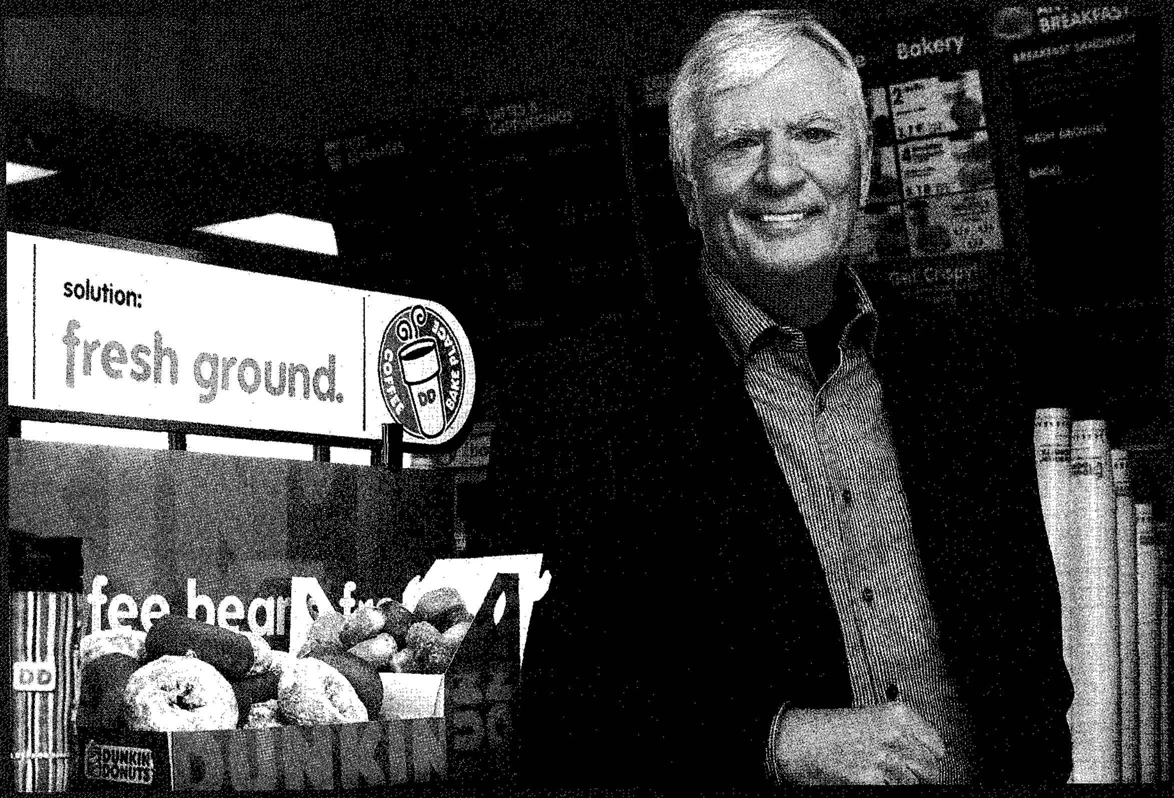

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thirty thousand—still a small number in a country that has a hundred and ten million people and a raging crime problem. "That's why the government decided to involve the Army," Monterrubio told me over coffee one morning. "If not them, who?"

There remains the problem of corruption. Several new vetting agencies, Monterrubio said, will conduct ongoing polygraph tests and background checks on all law-enforcement personnel. In the old days, there was a de-facto agreement between the government and the traffickers that the traffickers would kill each other among themselves. "But now," Monterrubio said, "the traffickers have realized that they can use the murders to send a message through the media. It's narco-terror."

Calderón's policy, which the Bush Administration is supporting with a $1.4-billion aid package, to be delivered beginning this year, is heavily weighted on the side of hardware and training for joint U.S.-Mexican operations along the border. Some critics would prefer a program that placed more emphasis on treatment for drug addiction and less on shootouts, but the question of whether a battle against drug use can be won by deploying military force is not one that government officials are willing to ask at this juncture. From the public's point of view, the government's crackdown has simply produced more violence.

"In the end, it's all absurd," Froylán Enciso, a friend of mine who is a historian specializing in the drug trade, remarked the other day. "The class solidarity between the troops and the growers is far greater than the soldiers' need to obey orders. They bargain: 'I need a statistic and you need to survive in this environment, so let's deal.' And the government gets its statistic, because every year they have to have a record-breaking figure for the press conference—more kilos of marijuana confiscated, more arrests made than ever before. And the cost that doesn't get factored into the figures"—how much a kilo of cocaine paste sells for at the point of manufacture versus its street value—"is the cost of the *narcocultura*. Because the logistics and the infrastructure and the narco-helicopters and narco-submarines are only a part of it. The real value of the drugs is the cost incurred by traffickers, small and large, in steeling themselves against the risks involved in delivering the drugs to the final consumer. The *narcocultura*—the mausoleums and the music and the baseball caps embroidered with marijuana leaves in Swarovski crystals—is the array of symbols they surround themselves with in order to ward off that fear."

On the first day of every month, at the Tepito metro stop in downtown Mexico City, a new breed of pilgrim can be observed inching his way on his knees out of the stop and down a filthy market street, and cradling in his arms, babylike, a plastic figure of Death—or Holy Death, La Santa Muerte, as the pilgrims refer to the robed skeleton, who carries, variously, a scythe, a sceptre, a set of scales, or a globe in her (sometimes his) hands. There were dozens of these effigies, borne by crawling men in their teens or early twenties. Tattooed and gaunt, they were dressed in black T-shirts with the sleeves ripped off and wore chains around their necks and silver skulls, like brass knuckles, on their fingers.

Their goal was some four blocks distant, in the heart of Tepito, a legendary neighborhood that in the centuries since the Spanish Conquest has remained stubbornly insubordinate. Venders were everywhere along the pilgrims' path, hawking T-shirts and baseball caps and medals decorated with the Santa Muerte.

The shrine of the Holy Death is just blocks away from a compound of low-income housing where, in 2007, Mexico City police conducted a full-scale assault in search of drugs, weapons, and other illegal goods. Enriqueta Romero Romero, known as Queta, or Quetita, set up the shrine on this spot seven years ago after one of her sons, who was himself a devotee of La Santa, made her a gift of the skeleton. The bewigged saint now stands in a glass case, elaborately robed and veiled according to Queta's inspiration—sometimes in rainbow gauze, sometimes in white lace. Queta and her son also more or less invented the 8 P.M. "Rosary" that is held on the first of every month, and draws thousands of the faithful, including the skull-ringed young men who, at a guess, make a paltry living running many kinds of errands for the lords of Tepito. Queta says the skeleton is feminine—the Niña Blanca, or White Girl-Child—and that those who say there is such a thing as a He-Death, and that one should have both on one's home altar, so the two can meet and marry, are charlatans. Queta is small, sixtyish, and bustling; she blows kisses at her Niña every other sentence and has a benevolent smile for everyone. But her gaze can narrow with suspicion in an alarming fashion, and one has the sense that she can summon dangerous help to her side very quickly.

The Santa Muerte had been hanging around the fringes of popular belief in Tepito and other raffish neighborhoods for decades—Queta says that she learned to pray to her from her aunt—but thanks to Queta her cult now extends throughout Mexico City and far beyond. There are, by Queta's count, two thousand shrines like hers in Mexico, and who knows if she is including the charlatans in her tally? (The cult is known for the drug traffickers' devotion to it, but it certainly embraces a far larger number of believers.) Hers, at any rate, was the first public shrine, and it holds a cathedral-like status for worshippers like Felicitas Castillo, a young woman who for the past five years has travelled once a month from the city of Xalapa, two hundred miles away, in order to offer the "Utmost Holy Death" roses and a mariachi serenade. On the day that I visited the shrine, the musicians played ranchera songs that are normally dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Castillo provided an answer heard many times when I asked the faithful what they prayed for. "I don't ask for much," Castillo said. "Health for my family, work." This is an answer recommended by Queta, who doesn't think that one should bargain with Death or be greedy. But the following afternoon, as the time for the Rosary drew near and worshippers pressed more and more tightly into the narrow street where the shrine is situated, one crawling young man said that he was praying for his ex-girlfriend, who lived in another state, to let him see his five-month-old daughter. A woman wanted the holy figure to help her get over the suicide, last year, of her fourteen-year-old son.

Along the edges of the packed street, young men took quick snorts of glue and sometimes wept. A thin tattooed and pierced man with terrible skin was the only one of the many young toughs present who was willing to talk to me, and his amiability may have had something to do with the fact that he had just absent-mindedly assembled a joint about the size of a Robusto and was now wreathed in its smoke. The Holy Death had restored to him the love of the excruciatingly shy woman at his side, the man said, and he was now Death's devotee forever. At the front of the crowd, banks of flowers to rival those laid at Princess Diana's grave paid tribute to the skeleton. Half hidden by the flowers was a large, clear plastic death figure, and behind it was a sound system at which one of Queta's sons would soon lead the Rosary. Behind that, Queta cackled in answer to a question. Yes, it was true that the Catholic Church disapproved of her "Little Skinny One," she said. "But have you noticed how empty their churches are?"

Queta's genius has been to create out of her Catholic faith an inclusive syncretic ritual: a Rosary, which is recited complete with Hail Marys and the Lord's Prayer; special prayers for those in jail; and a culminating, quasi-Pentecostal moment when the faithful all lift their effigy to Heaven to "charge it with energy." It is a cult, Queta says, accurately, that does not discriminate. A Catholic priest might extend grudging absolution to those who confess that they have just sold several grams of crystal meth to a bunch of twelve-year-olds, but only at Queta's Rosary can you be blessed on a monthly basis without the matter of how you earn a living ever coming up.

Queta, naturally enough, denies that the Santa Muerte is a devotion for drug traffickers—one more element of the *narcocultura*. Why, then, I wondered, was it perceived as such outside Tepito?

"Ha!" she exclaimed. "Because every single time one of them is arrested or killed they find my Little Skinny One on their altar!" From the storefront next to the shrine, where she sells candles and other devotional objects for the cult, she blew another kiss and called out to her patron saint, "*Preciosa!*" ♦

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PROFILES

THE BRIGHT SIDE

The relentless optimism of Thomas Friedman.

BY IAN PARKER

Thomas Friedman, the foreign-affairs columnist of the *Times*, a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner, and the best-selling author of reassuring books about unsettling things, finished his column for the August 3rd edition while sitting at a plywood dining table in a hut built on the ice sheet in northern Greenland, far above the Arctic Circle. Friedman is five feet seven, but when cold-weather clothing had been distributed on the previous day he had somehow been last in line, and he was engulfed in an extra-large bodysuit. Ann Friedman, his wife, sat opposite him, as he typed on a laptop. Through a window, a dozen tents could be seen, arranged in two parallel lines with a wide ice avenue between them, along which snowmobiles sometimes buzzed. Beyond this was an uninterrupted landscape of flat white ice that extended to the horizon, in every direction.

"What does that look *like*?" Friedman had just asked. The question nagged at him; though not blasé about the spectacle, he seemed uneasy that it had not yet resolved itself into an analogy. "A snow desert? A salt flat?" The author of "The World Is Flat" then said that he could see the curvature of the earth.

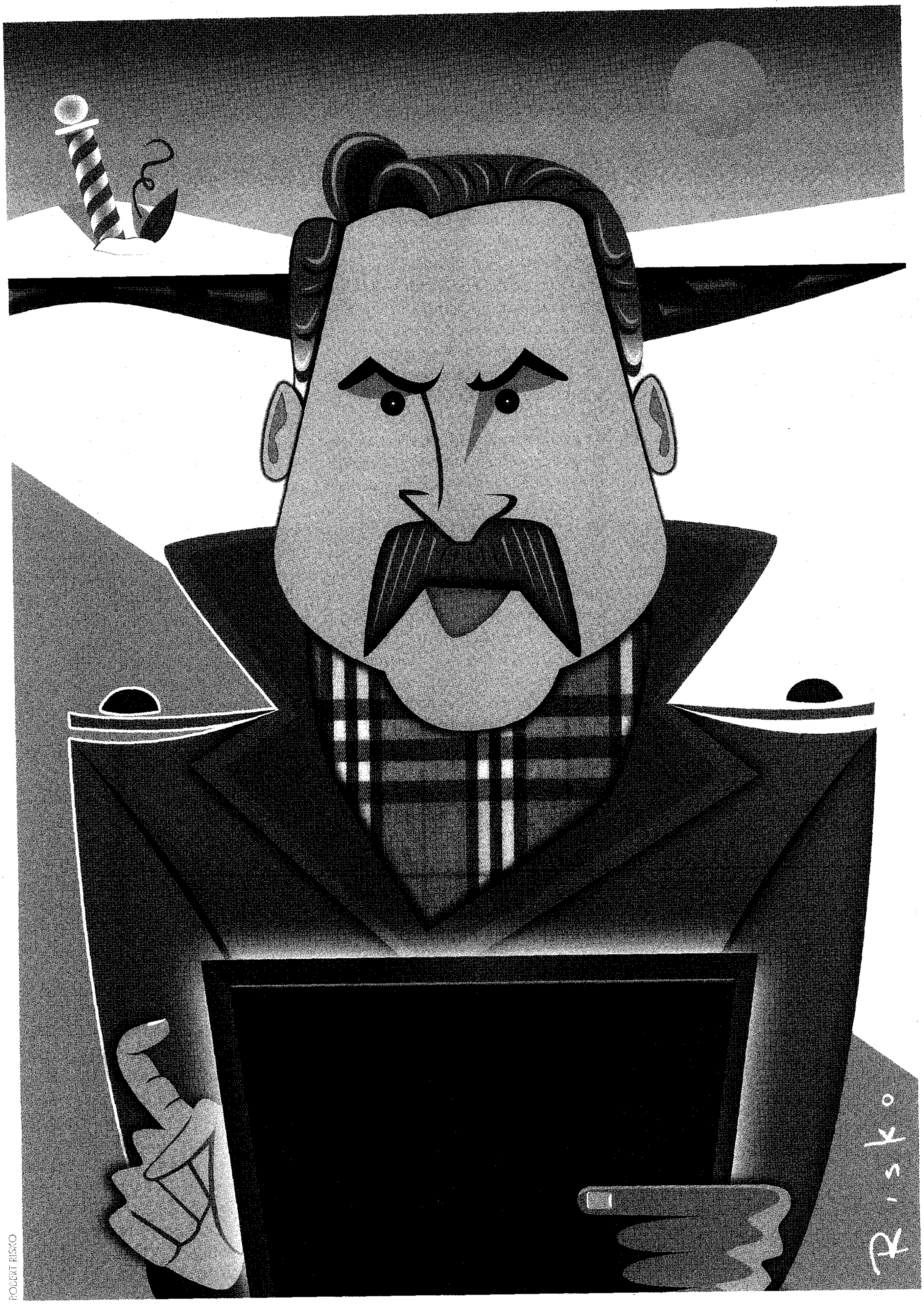
We were on land, but land covered in ice that was a mile and a half thick—tens of thousands of years of accumulated snowfall. The tents and huts composed a new research station; here, hardy and red-cheeked scientists were drilling cores of ice that might, in time, tell a history of the earth's climate since before the last ice age. A Hercules transport plane fitted with skis had delivered us that morning, and then taken off again, leaving behind the Friedmans; their host, Connie Hedegaard, the Danish minister of climate and energy; and more than a dozen others. Earlier, we had been in the south of the island, and before that in Denmark; and I had begun to get a sense of the professional methods of a man who is sometimes regarded—in despair or in celebration—as the most influential columnist in America.

He was perpetually working. ("Does the word 'indefatigable' come to you?" Ann Friedman asked me, dryly, at the end of a long dinner, at the end of a long day.) Wherever possible, he used his laptop to take notes; it sat in front of him during meals, except when a crush of tableware forced it onto his lap; he then covered the keyboard with a napkin, ate quickly, wiped his mustache, and started typing again. A U.S.B. memory stick dangled from a ribbon around his neck. When he had time to spare in airports, he strode up and down the concourses for the aerobic benefit. He liked to conduct group interviews that put him in the role of seminar leader, and put his interviewees into an unconscious competition to deliver lines that would be rewarded by the sound of laptop keys being struck. Friedman tended to ask a question by offering a prepared riff: something previously included in a college commencement address; or in the *Times;* or in "The World Is Flat," his best-selling 2005 book about globalization; or, particularly, in "Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—and How It Can Renew America," which Friedman had just delivered to his publisher. He pitched ideas to people, and people pitched back. "Come empty, you leave empty," Friedman said to me one evening. "Come with a point of view, and you could come back with something original." His hands were busy when he spoke, and then held their position for a moment when he stopped.

By temperament or by training, Friedman is a phrasemaker, and a friend of phrasemakers; and he seems unusually receptive to marketing in any form. He is the person who wants to hear the story that a tour guide wants to tell. When presented with the gift of a small flag of Greenland, he read aloud the branding on the packaging—"Greenland, the Coolest Place"—and seemed to take real pleasure in the phrase. He was at times a little defensive, protective of his dignity (a stance that can be a threat to dignity), but in my hearing he never gossiped or complained—behavior that gave him an air that was more ambassadorial than reporterly. "I'm always amazed by the number of journalists who hate people," he said at one point. His charging ambition was directly connected to getting work done, rather than to maintaining a reputation, and was overlaid with an almost goofily affable Midwestern manner: you sometimes sensed that Friedman had set himself the task of being more than just an American. On the road—and sometimes in print—he is America itself, or, at least, a wished-for America: politically temperate, unflagging, optimistic, and rhapsodically appreciative of golf.

"How do I do a column that isn't just 'Look at me, I'm in an igloo'?" he had asked the previous day, when we were in Kangerlussuaq, in southwest Greenland. (The trip was unusual in that his wife had joined him, but in other ways it was much like the ten or so journeys he makes every year, to China, India, the Middle East. He tends to set off without specific columns in mind, and without prior discussion with editors at the *Times*. "They'll find out I'm in Greenland on Sunday," he said.) Then he had heard a presentation that previewed the ice-sheet trip to come—a lively Danish scientist spoke of an archive of ice cores that included samples dating from between 1 B.C. and 1 A.D.—and Friedman was able to write his first paragraph. He turned the screen to show me. After quoting the scientist ("I will show you a Christmas snow, a real Christmas snow"), he had added, using the *Times'* daily allocation of exclamation

Climate change is the latest crisis that Friedman has redirected into a conversation about opportunity and national purpose.



ROBERT RISKO

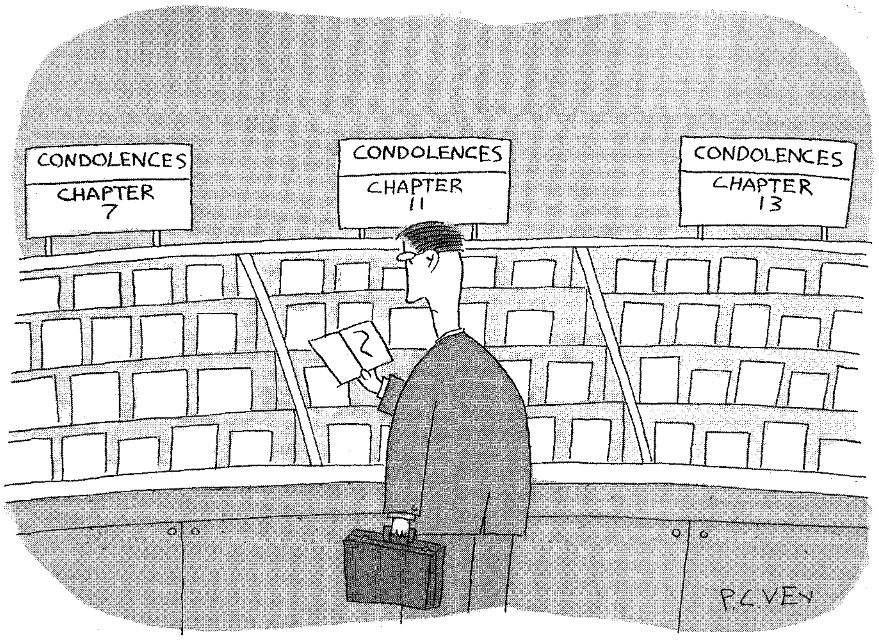
points, “Now that’s an offer you don’t get every day!” He said to me, “Now I’ve got a way. Under that, I can put all kinds of science.”

The next morning, we had flown north, into ice and dazzling sunshine. Squinting behind a ski mask, Friedman toured the research site. He sat on a sled pulled behind a snowmobile that was driven—erratically, at first—by Hedegaard, the climate minister. (“Can I see your license?” Friedman joked. He often takes the role of a chipper uncle in line at a barbecue.) In an underground chamber carved out of the ice, he held samples of the cores, cut into lumps the size of ice cubes. “This is like atmospheric DNA,” he said. “Amazing.” He began a conversation with a young researcher by asking, “What did your parents say when you told them you were getting a Ph.D. in ice?”

At about nine that evening, the project’s scientists began a series of presentations. Friedman was nearing the deadline for one of his twice-weekly *Times* columns—eight hundred and forty words, Wednesdays and Sundays. By this stage, he knew the shape of his piece: Christmas snow; ice cubes of history; sudden climate change. He was now checking facts, and testing lines. We heard an expert on the gas content of ice give a talk (fluorocarbons, isotopes) that was not ideally suited to a general audience drowsy from air travel and broiled musk ox. Upon finishing, the scientist asked for questions, and Friedman went first. When he ventures away from topics where he has the most expertise—the Middle East, globalization, energy—he is content to be seen as inexpert. How old was the oldest ice beneath us? When did the last ice age begin? And end? The scientist answered a little grudgingly, then asked, “Any other *gas* questions?”

After the lectures, the younger scientists put on a Coldplay CD and drank beer. Nearing midnight, the sun remained high above the horizon. Friedman didn’t move from his chair. Dorthe Dahl-Jensen, the leader of the project, sat beside him; they looked at his computer screen together, as if negotiating a mortgage—he works in the open, with no sign of guile—and he kept asking questions. “Would you call this the Arctic Circle?” Yes. “But not the North Pole?” No.

In the morning, there was a ninety-six-per-cent eclipse of the sun (an anticlimactic event, because even four per cent of Arctic sunshine, after it has bounced off Arctic ice, produces daylight). Friedman allowed himself a moment of self-parody. “ ‘America in Eclipse,’ ” he said, and laughed. “ ‘I had to go to Greenland to understand America!’ ” Sitting beside him, Ann Friedman added, “ ‘As America waxes and wanes . . .’ ” He turned to his laptop, his mustache seeming to pull down the corners of his mouth, while for a moment his wife spoke about her role as Friedman’s first reader. Friedman, who is known for staking a claim on an idea by giving it a nickname, had told me that he thinks of his wife as Anncarta—a pun on Encarta, Microsoft’s digital encyclopedia. “She is extremely well read,” he said. “She really knows her dots, and I’m really good at connecting them. The biggest fights in our marriage are about ‘I’m keeping that paragraph!’ ” A personable if wary woman, Ann Friedman is a first-grade reading and writing teacher, a former copy editor at a financial magazine, and a board member at a number of nonprofits, including Conservation International. She is also very wealthy. (Her father and uncle, Matthew and Martin Bucksbaum, opened a shopping center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1954; their company grew into a giant publicly traded real-estate investment trust, General Growth Properties. Earlier this year, *Forbes* put the family’s wealth at $2.2 billion—although General Growth, highly leveraged, recently came close to financial ruin.) “My dad worked every night,” she said. “I’m sure that’s why I was attracted to Tom, because my dad went back to the office my whole life. That’s how I grew up.” She reads her husband’s columns before they are submitted, and a few times a year she causes him to start from scratch. She lobbies for precision, she said, and has at times removed “a harsher tone—‘What fools, what idiots.’ ”



Her husband looked up from the screen, to say that ninety-nine per cent of his columns passed through her scrutiny largely unaltered.

“Ninety to ninety-five per cent,” she said.

Not long after, he showed me his draft, which was a little rough (a misspelling or two, a repetition, the unwarranted suggestion that the research station was on a glacier) but largely done. He perhaps hadn’t found the easy authority of his columns from Cairo, Jerusalem, or Washington—the sense of informality fully earned, and fully covered by reporting held in reserve—but he had neatly drawn his readers toward a new scientific paper, based on drilling work done by this team at a previous research site, suggesting that the last ice age had ended with a sudden change in temperature: ten degrees Celsius in fifty years. “Some climate-change deniers would say that this proves that mankind is not important in changing the climate,” he wrote. “Climate-change experts, like Dahl-Jensen, say it’s not so simple: the climate is always changing, sometimes very abruptly, so the last thing that mankind should be doing is adding its own forcing actions—like pumping un-

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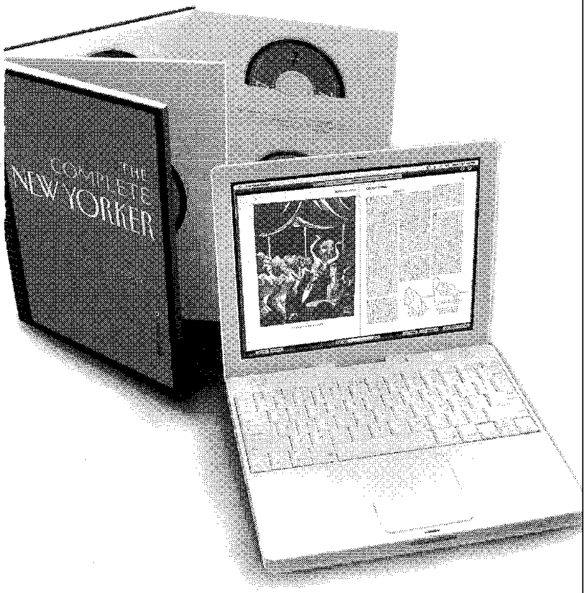

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' Friedman lives in suburban
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n bureau, and I walked with him one morning across the city. We stopped at a bench on Pennsylvania Avenue near the U.S. Federal Courthouse, where we had a view of the Capitol. He spoke of the new book's title: "It was going to be called 'Green Is the New Red, White, and Blue.' But I just wrote one day, 'Flat just met crowded.' All these people"—in India and China, especially—"walked onto the flat world, with the American Dream. We had already filled up the bathtub with our consumption, then somebody turned on the shower." He was tired, and had been working without interruption for months. Talk of the book spilled out of him; there barely seemed to be a non-book compartment in his mind. He was gracious, but spoke to me as if to a room full of people. "I'm a big believer in 'To name something is to own it,' " he said. "And the people who named 'green'—they named it liberal, tree-hugging, sissy, girlie-man. I'm out to rename green. If you rename it geopolitical, geostrategic, capitalistic, strong, you're going to get a totally different response." I had read some of this before—Friedman's job is to lure readers, and he no more apologizes for repetition than does a hot-dog vender in a ballpark.

Friedman's readers know that the idea of "flatness" first came to him in Bangalore, India, while talking to Nandan Nilekani, the head of the software consulting company Infosys. At the time, Friedman was making "The Other Side of Outsourcing," a television documentary. The first chapter of "The World Is Flat" describes the conversation and the epiphany. "What I learned from Tom is speed," Nilekani recently said. "He and I had this conversation on February 28, 2004, or something like that, and the book was on the stands April 5, 2005. And I realized, when you have a story to tell you can't dither over it for years and years—you're going to be obsolete. That's why I often refer to him as an intellectual entrepreneur: entrepreneurs succeed because they get a business idea and then they move faster than the rest, they bring the product to market. He does the same in an intellectual sense."

Friedman also made two documentaries about energy and conservation, but he recalls that the real prompt to write "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" came early in 2007, while he was preparing a speech for a fund-raiser in Minnesota, in which he set out the idea of trying to redefine "green." Not long after, he cut-and-pasted parts of the speech to fashion an article for the *Times Magazine*, "The Power of Green," which was hard not to read as a book proposal. ("In the world of ideas, to name something is to own it," he wrote. "If you can name an issue, you can own the issue.") By then, Friedman said, he was "pregnant" with the idea. "There was a moment when I felt almost a sense of dread: I've got to do this; it's in me, and if I don't do it I'm going to regret it, I'm going to see the ideas out there." He talked to Jonathan Galassi, who runs Farrar, Straus & Giroux, his publisher. "I'm in this scary and enviable position," Friedman said. "I can go to my publisher and say, 'I want to write a book.' 'Here's the check.' 'Don't you want to know what it's about?' 'No, we don't care.' It isn't quite like that, but it's pretty much like that." He started writing in July of last year, and over the winter took a break from his column for five months. "I write my books by writing my books," he said. "I don't start with six months of research." (When he quotes from news stories, they tend to have been published during the period of composition.) He works without a research assistant, and he writes at all times. "Ann drives and I work," he said. "We'll go to Baltimore—she drives the car and I work in the car. So I don't waste any time. If I'm on an airplane for five hours, that's my happiest time. No phone calls, no interruptions." He wrote the draft of one chapter during a single flight, from Seattle to D.C., after a meeting with Bill Gates. Prompted by Gates, Friedman added some analysis of what he calls "energy poverty"—the lives of those with no access to electricity.

He delivered a draft by early summer, and then kept working on it. Friedman told me about a meeting with Paul Elie, his editor at F.S.G. They were looking at a chapter called "Our Carbon Copies (Or, Too Many Americans)," about rising consumer consumption around the world. Friedman remembered the "kitchen debate" between Nixon and Khrushchev, in 1959—a public tussle over the relative technological superiority of the United States and the Soviet Union. "We were editing, and it popped into my head," Friedman recalled. "I said, 'Paul, Google "Nixon and Khrushchev," ' and, literally, we wrote it together on the screen." He revised the book until he was told that it was too late to make changes, and at that moment Friedman created a file on his laptop called "Hot, Flat, and Crowded Paperback" and started filling it with new material. (Later iterations of "The World Is Flat"—the "2.0" and "3.0" editions—contained large-scale revisions and expansions.)

Friedman said, "My book takes five subjects that are written about separately—energy and resource supply and demand, climate change, petrodictatorship, biodiversity loss, and energy poverty—and says they all have a single solution, which is abundant, cheap, clean, reliable electrons." That solution is reached, he said, "by leveraging the greatest innovation engine God ever created, which is the combination of American research universities, venture capital, and the marketplace." American capitalism is the answer—Friedman puts the future of the world squarely in the hands of people in business-class seats reading Thomas Friedman books—though government must first have the good sense to withdraw its regulatory support for fossil fuels, and favor alternatives. The result would be a booming industry that Friedman calls energy technology, or E.T. Rather than a Manhattan Project for alternative energy—a model that he once promoted—he argues for "market shaping," which will "get 10,000 inventors working in 10,000 companies and 10,000 garages and 10,000 laboratories to drive transformational breakthroughs." (Tom Brokaw, moderating the second Presidential debate shortly after interviewing Friedman on "Meet the Press," posed a question in exactly those terms.) America, which in Friedman's view has been adrift since September 11th, will save the world, and its own soul, through "nation-building at home."

"America has a problem and the world has a problem," he said to me, as he has said to others. "And America's problem is that we've lost our groove. The world has a real problem: it's getting hot, flat, and crowded. And I think America solves its problem by taking a lead in solving the world's problem."

Paul Romer, the Stanford economist, once remarked to Friedman that "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste." Friedman likes the phrase enough to have quoted it in "The World Is Flat," and again in "Hot, Flat, and Crowded." Friedman is not blithe, or without passion, but his career can be seen as one that has redirected left-of-center dismay or unease (about terrorism, globalization, climate change, American political inertia) into a conversation about opportunity and national purpose—and, to a large degree, has done this through the insistent marshalling of rhetoric. "I don't mind using rhetoric," Friedman said. "I get criticized for that a lot: it's 'too cute,' too this or that. But I've never had a reader come up to me and say, 'That book was *too easy* to read. That anecdote went down too easily.' To simplify something accurately, you've got to understand it deeply."

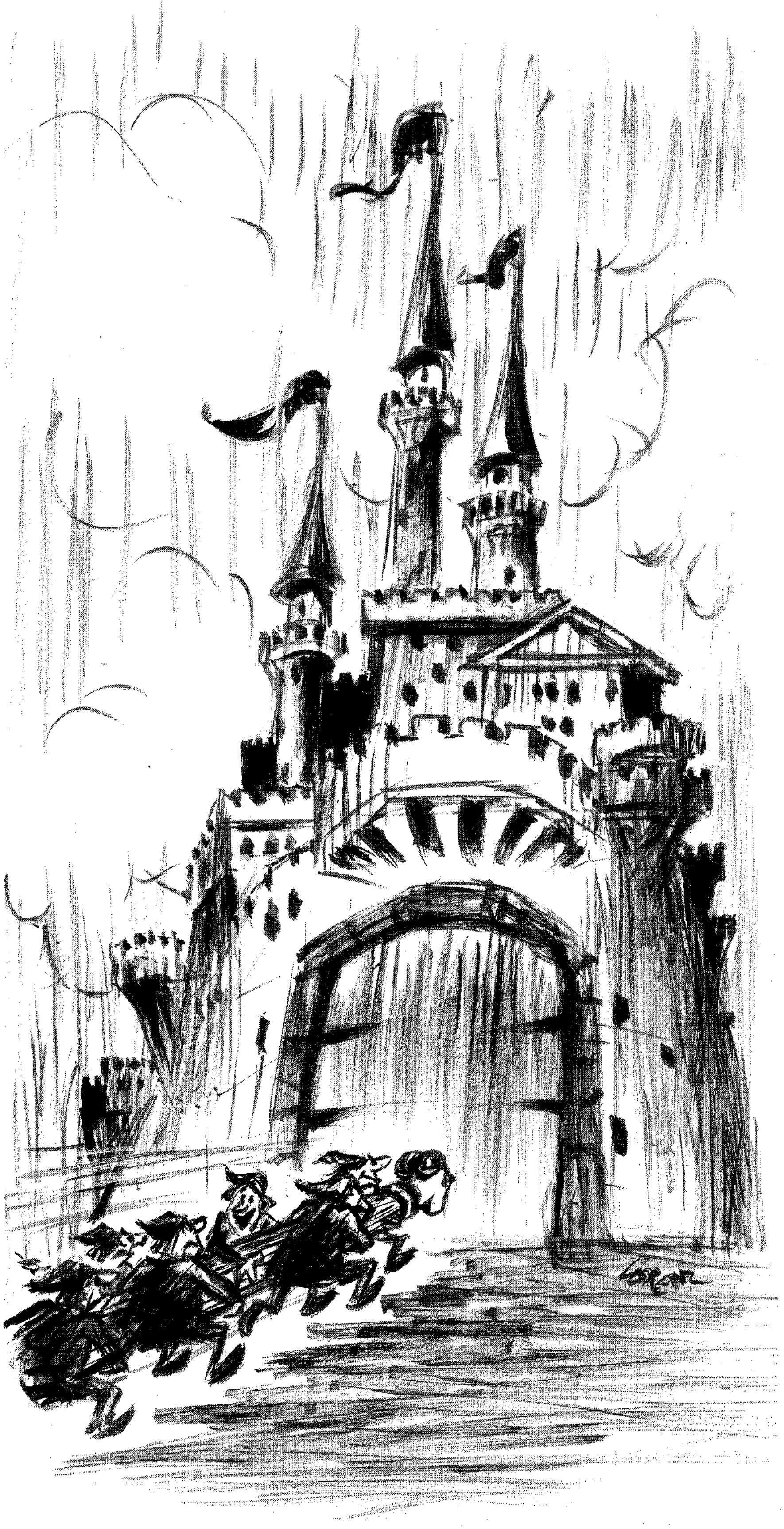
In the Friedman mind, things tend to be like something else. The new is like the old. The foreign is like the American. The scattered has a pattern. The collapse in credit markets in September was, in a Friedman column, "a financial 9/11"; looking from the other end of the analogy, he has called modern terrorism a "bubble." For this analogizing instinct, Friedman has an analogy: "There's a pinball game going on in my head. Balls bouncing around."

When he talks about energy innovation, Friedman likes to ask, "Does it scale?" In other words, is this a cool new technology, or is it a new technology that stands a chance of being used by everyone, everywhere? Similarly, he asks himself: Is this an idea, or an idea that will stick? The provenance and the reach of ideas matter to him deeply. When Bob Woodward, in "Plan of Attack," cited Colin Powell using the phrase "the Pottery Barn rule," in reference to overseas military interventions—you break a country, you own it—Friedman called Woodward to point out that the coinage was his. As Friedman put it to me, with good humor, "Guys, just a nod . . . " (As it happens, Pottery Barn has no such rule. "It's upsetting and absurd that that analogy has been put out there," a company representative was quoted as saying in 2004. "You'd think that somewhere along the line they would have checked.")

The material in "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" is a challenge to Friedman, because it has the potential to be both disheartening and dull. "I had to explain how a utility works!" Friedman said, laughing. "I have a chapter called 'If It Isn't Boring, It Isn't Green.' " He is pleased with the imagery suggested by his title, and with what he calls "snappy" chapter titles, but the book doesn't have the simple metaphorical architecture of "The World Is Flat" or its predecessor, "The Lexus and the Olive Tree," which described the interplay of the forces of trade and development with those of nationalism and tradition.

In a curious way, this rhetorical challenge has become his subject. As Friedman said, "I've always described my books as books about how to think about a problem. Not necessarily the specific detailed answer." "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" is impressive for its synthesis of data, and for its attention to unglamorous detail. For example, Friedman is scornful of Congress's failure, in vote after vote, to commit to long-term tax incentives for the alternative-energy industry—a failure that he has also highlighted in his columns. (When this problem was finally fixed, at least for solar energy, in the October bailout bill, Rhone Resch, who heads the solar-industry lobby, wrote to thank Friedman, and noted that many people had told him, "Congress finally listened to Thomas Friedman.") But Friedman does run the risk of rhetorical self-involvement, and not only because he is so invested in giving his arguments autobiographical context. In his first chapter, he revisits a column he wrote about the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul, but arrives at the scene by introducing us to a stranger who approached Friedman in a London theatre to praise him.

Glenn Prickett, who is a senior vice-president at Conservation International and a friend of Friedman's, recently said that, in his view, "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" breaks new ground intellectually, "but, honestly, just by having written it, he's effective. Half the pages could be blank, and some people wouldn't notice, but the effect would have been made, which is 'Wow, Tom Friedman has brought this issue into his world view, so I need to take this seriously.' " An author who thought too much about that would surely risk sounding more like a self-help guru, or a political candidate, than like an analyst—and, when



"Crenellated! That's the word I was trying to remember!"

talking to Friedman, one can feel the tightness of the space between who he is and who he feels his readers need him to be. A writer can be conscientious and distractingly tactical at the same time. "I'm here to speak out of two sides of my mouth, in this book," he told me. "To conservatives from center right to Rush Limbaugh, I say, 'I've got a plan to make America stronger.' To greens and liberals, I say, 'I've got a plan to take care of climate change, biodiversity loss, petro-dictatorship—and in the process it's going to make us respected, more entrepreneurial, make our capital systems work better. It's going to make us more secure.' So I am, avowedly, trying to find an argument. The problem with so much of the green argument previously, it spoke not even to half the country. I enormously admire Al Gore, and he's truly a hero of mine, but half of the country sees him and plugs their ears, so Al Gore could not carry this thing, you know, on a national scale."

Upon leaving Pennsylvania Avenue, we walked to the National Press Club, where Friedman was due to speak to an energy-efficiency forum. As he left the elevator on the thirteenth floor, a number of people gushed and asked him to sign books. "Thank you. Thanks so much. Appreciate it. Terrific," he said. With some time to spare before the panel, he sat in a side room with the other panelists—Rob Watson, the environmentalist who helped create a system for rating the eco-efficiency of buildings, whom he knows well and frequently quotes, and David B. Goldstein, a co-director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's energy program. They ate lunch while holding a conversation almost entirely in metaphors. ("We just got a bad blood-pressure reading, we need to exercise, and we'll feel happier when we do"; "It's sort of like asking a bumblebee how it flies"; "Anyone can jump out of a plane and pretend they're flying for ten minutes"; "We have already hit the iceberg and the S. S. Humanity's going down.")

After lunch, Friedman found himself in a familiar position: gripping a podium with both hands. "America has a problem," he announced. "I think we've lost our groove since 9/11. And the world has a real problem." Then he read from the book's first paragraph: "I was visiting London with my daughter Orly, and one evening we went to see the play 'Billy Elliot,' at a theater near Victoria Station. During intermission, I was standing up, stretching my legs in the aisle next to my seat, when a stranger approached and asked me, 'Are you Mr. Friedman?' "

A few years ago, the Friedmans bought a seven-and-a-half-acre lot in Bethesda, Maryland. They tore down the existing house, built an eleven-thousand-square-foot replacement, and planted two hundred trees. (In a note at the end of "Hot, Flat, and Crowded," where Friedman explains his own ecological circumstances—geothermal heating, solar panels—he invites readers, perhaps unwisely, to regard his real-estate move as an act of rescue: he writes that he and his wife bought the land "to prevent it from being redeveloped into a subdivision of a dozen or more houses," which could sound like someone buying a lot of champagne to protect society from cork-related injuries.) Here, the Friedmans have started an art collection on a theme of reading, writing, and the media, which includes a book by Anselm Kiefer and a bench by Jenny Holzer.

"Honestly, I still can't wait to get my pants on in the morning," Friedman said. He wakes early, then exercises on a stationary bike, and if he has a column in the paper that day he'll read it through online two or three times, asking himself, "Did I get it right?" On weekdays, he'll head into D.C. for a seven-thirty breakfast meeting, which is sometimes followed by an eight-thirty breakfast meeting. The *Times* has a floor and a half of a building a few blocks north of the White House, and three of the four Op-Ed columnists who are based in Washington—Friedman, David Brooks, and Maureen Dowd, whom Friedman calls his closest friend on the paper—have offices at one end of an open-plan news floor. "I see him every few weeks or months, passing through on his way to Fez," Dowd recently said. Friedman's large corner office has windows that are oddly small and high, leaving wide areas of wall space. He has hung a poster of a three-masted sailing ship tipping off the edge of a flat world, which he bought long before he wrote "The World Is Flat"—attracted, in part, by the title, which is "I Told You So."

I met him there late one morning; he had just returned from the funeral service for Tim Russert, the NBC News journalist, who died, of a heart attack, at the age of fifty-eight. "I made a mental note to say to you: I'm going to be fifty-five this summer," Friedman said. "My dad died at fifty-six. So I've always been aware that time is short. Tim Russert's death just really only reinforces it. I am going to grab as much as I can. I am not going to miss a second."

We began to talk a little about his earlier career and upbringing, until Friedman said, "You know, we should do this in order. We can do the biography." He began, "I was born in Minneapolis. And my dad worked for a ball-bearings company that was started by his best friend. And I grew up in a kind of 'Ozzie and Harriet' suburb, St. Louis Park, and went to the same grade school, junior high, senior high, with the same kids." He went on, "My mom was of that generation of really, really smart women who were pre-women's lib." She joined the Navy after Pearl Harbor, started a university degree after the war, and then stayed home when she married and had children—two girls, and then Thomas, who was born in 1953. In later life, Margaret Friedman became a championship-level bridge player. She died earlier this year, and Friedman wrote a column headlined "Call Your Mother," which was largely based on the eulogy he gave at her funeral. "She was the most uncynical person in the world," he wrote. "She was not naïve. She had taken her knocks. But every time life knocked her down, she got up, dusted herself off and kept on marching forward, motivated by the saying that pessimists are usually right, optimists are usually wrong, but most great changes were made by optimists." Friedman said to me, "I don't do pessimism." He added, "I'm the father in Cormac McCarthy's book"—"The Road." "I'm the last guy walking. I'll be looking for the solution at the end of the road."

Friedman seems to have been a smart and earnest boy. As Ken Greer, his childhood friend, recently said, "He was not part of the crowd that went to pop con-

SUMMER AT BLUE CREEK, NORTH CAROLINA

There was no water at my grandfather's
when I was a kid and would go for it
with two zinc buckets. Down the path,
past the cow by the foundation where
the fine people's house was before
they arranged to have it burned down.
To the neighbor's cool well. Would
come back with pails too heavy,
so my mouth pulled out of shape.
I see myself, but from the outside.
I keep trying to feel who I was,
and cannot. Hear clearly the sound
the bucket made hitting the sides
of the stone well going down,
but never the sound of me.

—*Jack Gilbert*

certs." In his senior year of high school, Friedman took a course in English literature taught by Miriam Kagol, who has kept in touch with her pupil. She remembered that he had a particular interest in the Kennedy assassination, and was always looking for ways to work the Warren Commission into discussion of, say, "Macbeth." She added, with fondness, "He was very disdainful of poetry, which is very difficult when you're studying British literature: 'If what they have to say is so important, why don't they just get to the point and say it?' He thought that the frills and the poetic devices would get in the way of a message; he wanted it clear and concise and direct. Get to the point, support the point, and get out!" Friedman was the prose editor of *Mandala*, the school's literary journal. On one occasion, he brought a golf magazine to a *Mandala* meeting, and passed around an article in which golf photographs were captioned with poems that Kagol remembers as doggerel in haiku form. "Now, Mrs. Kagol, *this* is poetry," he told her.

Today, Greer said affectionately, "Tom goes on and on about golf." As Friedman wrote to me in a recent e-mail, the golf course has become "the one place I can go and no one stops you and asks what you think of the latest Israeli-Palestinian peace plan." In a ritual that began when he was six and lasted until he was eighteen, he played the sport with his father on summer evenings: "He'd come home, eat quickly, and we'd go play golf together." Friedman was captain of his high-school golf team. He now has a five handicap—or, as he put it to me, "I can play." (Jerry Tarde, the editor-in-chief of *Golf Digest*, where Friedman is a contributing editor, told me, "He's not a *great* golfer but a very fine striker of the ball: very competitive, but he does it in a nice way.") Friedman has half-formed plans to write a golf book—"to spend a year on the tour, and write a book on the meaning of golf, and golf as life"—which, one assumes, would outsell every other book written in history.

In his mid-teens, Friedman arrived at a second obsession. He was from a Jewish family; as a boy, he only ever left Minnesota to go to a Zionist summer camp in Wisconsin. Then, in the tenth grade, he took his first trip by plane when he and his parents visited Shelley, the older of his sisters, who was on a junior year abroad at Tel Aviv University. (Soon after, she became ultra-Orthodox, a Lubavitcher, and remains so today.) It was the end of 1968, and the Six-Day War was a fresh memory. "Israel's in its heroic phase," Friedman recalled. "I was just blown away by Israel." He returned the next summer, alone, to stay on a kibbutz, and made the same trip the following two summers. "My time in high school was basically a celebration of Israel's victory in the Six-Day War," Friedman told me.

When he was a freshman at the University of Minnesota, in 1971, he took Arabic. "It was a little radical for a Jewish kid. You know, maybe there was a bit of rebellion in it: 'You all study Hebrew; *I'm* studying Arabic.'" In 1972, in his sophomore year, he visited Egypt on his way to Israel, where he spent a semester at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. By then, he said, "my views were kind of settling in to where they are today, which is: That there are these people called Palestinians, that the Jews will never be home unless the Palestinians are home, and that the Palestinians will never be home unless the Jews are." While he was on this trip, his father died, of a heart attack, on the fifteenth green of Rolling Green Country Club, outside Minneapolis. The loss is still sharply felt. Friedman was playing in a club championship on a course in Baltimore this summer when a tree limb fell to the ground near him, and, as he later told me in an e-mail, his mind turned to his father: "I suddenly had this feeling that he was watching over me and I started to cry. I know this sounds sappy but what can I say?"

Friedman transferred to Brandeis before his junior year. He spent the following summer at the American University in Cairo—a sojourn that launched a career in public speaking. Today, Friedman receives ten to fifteen speaking requests a week. The rules of the *Times* allow him to take a speaking fee only from nonprofit organizations; he usually speaks for free, but can ask for tens of thousands of dollars. (A few years ago, an author with a more modest following asked for his advice about preparing for a book tour. Friedman's reply: "Crowd control.") This all began when he was twenty: "When I came home from Cairo, I would do slide shows for Hadassah women's meetings and student groups around Brandeis. I can still see myself with my tray of slides, and getting the screen set up in someone's living room and telling them about Egypt. Which sounds so ludicrous now, since everyone and his brother has been there. But back then, at a time of a total wall of hostility between Israel and the Arab world, it was unusual." He laughed. "That's where I got my start—it's like, you know, some rock singer remembering the first bar where he played." (One senses in Friedman a common-enough conflict between the desire to have achievement recognized and the knowledge that one shouldn't brag. Immodesty occasionally shows; and, when Paul Krugman, his Op-Ed colleague, won the Nobel Prize in Economics, a few weeks ago, I was told that the reaction heard most often at the *Times* was "How's Tom going to take that?")

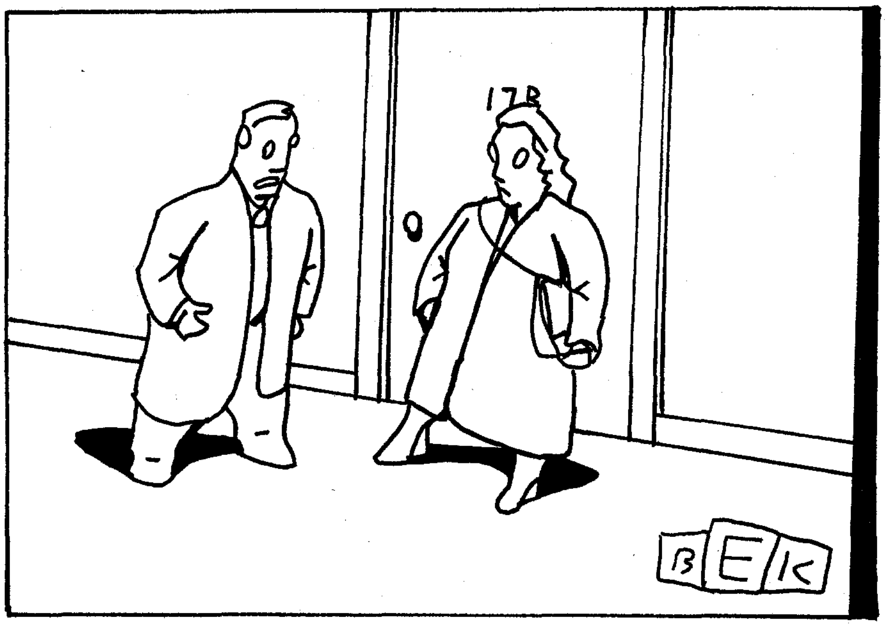
Later, as a graduate student in London, Friedman continued to speak publicly. He recalled giving a talk to a Jewish group there, not long after he had met Ann Bucksbaum, his future wife, who was studying at the London School of Economics. Bucksbaum came to the event with her parents, who were visiting. In a detail that Friedman did not mention when telling the story, his wife recalled that "no one was paying attention! I was getting so mad. My parents were so embarrassed. I was 'Sh-h-h!' "

Friedman transferred to Oxford, to study for a B. Phil. in modern Middle Eastern studies, and Bucksbaum returned to the United States. For two years, the couple exchanged letters. The ones that Friedman sent "were not romantic," according to his wife. "They were Middle East peace plans." Friedman acknowledged, "I was intense, driven." An Oxford professor once told him that he was "relentless," and didn't mean the word kindly.

When Friedman proposed marriage to Bucksbaum, it was a condition that she join him in the Middle East for four years. In the event, they were away for most of the next decade. They were married in London in 1978, just as Friedman started his first job—at U.P.I., the news agency. In April, 1982, Friedman became the *Times*' bureau chief in Beirut. Two months later, Israel invaded Lebanon. He reported on the invasion, the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, the suicide bombings of the American Embassy and the Marine headquarters. "The biggest survival mechanism, being a Jewish *Times* correspondent in the Arab world, is listening," Friedman said. "It's a sign of respect, and if you will just listen to people and let them not just vent but say what's on their mind it's amazing what they'll let you say back."

David Zucchino, a reporter at the Los Angeles *Times*, was then in Beirut for the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. "It was the biggest story in the world, for two years," he recently said. "Tom had built his whole adult life toward that moment. He was very ambitious, and you could tell even then that he was almost too big for daily reporting." Friedman's colleagues sometimes referred to him as Little Tommy, Zucchino said, "because he was such a boy wonder." He went on, "He was friendly and charming, but he wasn't one of the guys you saw hanging around the bar at night. Even dinner or lunch, it was business." Friedman's reporting on Sabra and Shatila helped win him his first Pulitzer Prize. He said that he was driven to pursue the story "not for news reasons but for Jewish reasons. I felt it was a real blot on my people's history, and I wanted to get to the bottom of it."

In 1984, Friedman moved to Jerusalem as bureau chief, and it was there that both of his daughters were born. (Orly graduated from Yale in 2007, and is in the Teach for America program in D.C.; Natalie is a junior at Williams.) He won his second Pulitzer in 1988, for his reporting from Israel. ("I said to Ann, 'I won the Pulitzer.' And she said, 'What for? Commentary?' " He laughed. "Because I was a reporter then, but I was very opinionated.") He began writing his first book while still in Israel. Published in 1989, "From Beirut to Jerusalem" combined material from his daily dispatches with memoir and rumination, and won a National Book Award. "I came to think of Beirut as a huge abyss, the darkest corner of human behavior," he writes. "The experience leaves you wearing an emotional bullet-proof vest." Later, Friedman's writing would be driven by ideas; here it was driven by people and events—by politics and war. Friedman calls it the favorite of his books, and many readers would say the same.



"I'm sorry—I hope we can still care about how the other one enjoyed his or her pasta."

He took on the State Department beat; then, for the first year of the Clinton Administration, he was the paper's chief White House correspondent. Late every evening, the *Times* and the Washington *Post* showed each other their front pages. Friedman recalled, "It is the worst feeling in the world. Your competition has on the front page a story that you don't have; and you have to start matching it, which involves calling officials at home at ten-thirty-five. And I just was not built to do that kind of journalism." Friedman, who has often talked about the crucial, but underexamined, role of humiliation as a force in world affairs, remembered a particularly forlorn moment: being pushed aside by a photographer while waiting for Clinton outside a church in D.C.

In April, 1993, Strobe Talbott gave up his foreign-affairs column at *Time* when he took a job in the State Department. Friedman was offered the slot. He declined, but the offer encouraged him to start a conversation with Arthur O. Sulzberger, Jr., the publisher of the *Times*, about a future column. "Without promising me anything, Arthur said, 'You have no economic training. You need to have that, and stretch yourself.' " Friedman became international economics correspondent, covering the Treasury, trade agreements, and the phenomenon that was beginning to be called "globalization." He began his column in January, 1995.

"When I started, it was a little bit of a shock to the foreign-affairs community," Friedman recalled. "Because I wrote a lot about Asia, and I wrote a lot about economics, and I wrote a lot about technology. The foreign-affairs community—they had a sense that foreign policy was about Europe. It was about arms control. It was about issues with hair on them. I went out to Microsoft, and I wrote a column on 'Does Microsoft have a foreign policy?' "

Friedman has written more than twelve hundred columns. "The easiest are the ones when you open up a vein: Obama, Bush," he said. "It takes an hour, it takes you as long as your fingers take to type the letters." These are the ones that "flow through me," he said. At other times, "The story flows around me, I have to grab it, I need an interpreter for everything." He has a group of key interpreters—Ann Friedman called them his "wise men"—one of whom is Michael Mandelbaum, the foreign-policy expert at Johns Hopkins University, whose name has appeared in fifty columns, and whose guidance is in many others.

Friedman seems to think in columns, and one can regard this as both a psychological oddity and an unusual guarantee of authorial sincerity. Maureen Dowd told me, "Tom expresses himself to the reader in exactly the way he expresses himself to me. And that is really rare, especially when you have to do columns twice a week." She called him wise and unjaded. (She also described a kind of innocence: "He came back from Davos a couple of years ago, and he was in my office, and said, 'Oh, you know, I sat near this woman at dinner and she was really attractive.' And I said, 'What was her name?' He said, 'Angelina?' ")

Friedman won his third Pulitzer for the columns he wrote in late 2001. (He is now on the Pulitzer board; while there, he is disqualified from winning more.) "I feel there's my column pre-9/11 and my column post-9/11, if I'm honest," he said. "I was having a more direct conversation. I was opening myself up more." Some of his pieces were from overseas—Pakistan, Israel, Afghanistan. But he also wrote from home: "I did one that was, look, Cave-dwelling is for bin Laden. Here's what I'm doing. I'm going golfing. Don't let this guy get to you. I've just bought a set of shiny new golf clubs. My girls were in school, and they had field trips planned to New York that had been cancelled. I was royally pissed at the school district for doing that. And so a lot of my message was: You've got to live your life. Don't let them take that away from us now. There was a deep Midwest thing going on." There was also a larger patriotism. "There's something I so admire about Warren Buffett. His whole thing about philanthropy is rooted in how lucky you are to have been born in this country, at this time. Do not think you are a genius, O.K.? You were just part of that lucky group. I'm not out to conquer the world. It's a much more inward-looking patriotism. I want everyone to become an American."

When "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" was published, in early September, Friedman came to New York to publicize it, and late one afternoon I met him in a dressing room in the Ed Sullivan Theatre, on Broadway, not long before he was to be interviewed by David Letterman, on "The Late Show." It was publication day; the book was already No. 1 on Amazon.com, and later débuted atop the *Times* best-seller list, selling forty thousand copies a week. We largely talked about Friedman's position on the Iraq war, and the conversation continued as he was taken through makeup and then brought by elevator to the entrance to the stage, where Keira Knightley was discussing her distaste for the gym. There was an urgency in Friedman's delivery, close to agitation; at the same time, he seemed almost unnaturally calm about the TV appearance to come. He allowed for no more than a minute or two between the end of his conversation with me and his handshake with Letterman.

Friedman has never voted Republican. "I think of myself as a progressive," he had told me. "But I believe in my own definition of what being a progressive is: I believe in free markets and in social welfare and I believe that only if you have a free market will you have the economic growth you need to have social safety nets to take care of people brutalized in the marketplace. I'm not a partisan. I'm not at war with Republicans or liberal Democrats. Most people are like that. They're not hyper-partisan—they just want you to come up with the right answer."

When we had first spoken about Iraq, in his office, Friedman began by saying, "It's a very important question that I have to ask you: Have you read those columns?" He had then said, with justification, that his writing from the prewar period showed "that I was really, really torn. I said, 'I'm for the war, 52-49.' People said, 'That doesn't add up.' I said, 'I know.' At the end of the day, I knew that it was a gamble. But as I weighed everything out I thought it was a gamble worth taking." (His wife disagreed.)

To some on the left, he will always be a pro-war cheerleader. A review of "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" in *Slate* wondered if it was "Friedman's bid to make everyone forget he pounded the table in favor of an American invasion of Iraq." Friedman said, "I'd be lying to you if I said that it didn't really hurt, people totally simplifying the position. But, at the same time, 'Come on, Tom. This was a heated issue. Ultimately, you took a position.' " He went on, "It was about this neighborhood I knew, and people I liked, and people who are ruled in a way that is really bad for them, and, ultimately, really dangerous for the world. That's where it comes from. It was never about W.M.D., it was about P.M.D.—*people* of mass destruction." The United States had treated the Arab world, he said, "as a collection of big, dumb gas stations, basically. We told them, 'Here's the deal. Keep your pumps open, your prices low, and be nice to the Jews. And you can do whatever you want out back.' And it was my view that on September 11, 2001, we got hit with the distilled essence of everything that was going on out back: treat your women however you like, deprive your people of whatever civil rights you like, print whatever crazy conspiracies about the West that you like." To his mind, "violent radical Islam represented the third great totalitarian challenge to open societies," after Soviet Communism and Nazism.

But the risk of intervention was evident: "I'd lived through Beirut and knew that this really could be Beirut on steroids, I think is the term I used." (The idea of "the Pottery Barn rule" also dates from this period.) "Before the war, I said Iraq is a black box. And when we break it open we're going to find an envelope that says one of two things: 'Congratulations, you've just won the Arab Germany, a powerful country that just had a bad leader and now is just ready to take off.' The other envelope says, 'Congratulations, you just won the Arab Yugoslavia, and you are the new Tito.' I wrote that at least once or twice before the war. And so I was a bundle of contradictions, is the real truth."

Friedman writes about context; he lavishes metaphors on the social and economic forces behind change. And this process has an element of play: at the head of a table, he'll press his palms together, put his fingertips to his mouth, and lean forward with a smile that says, "Folks, you're going to love this." His thoughts are often about the range of possible thoughts (and a range can always include the sunniest: one of Friedman's favorite column constructions is "The good news . . . the bad news"). He doesn't bring unbending Orwellian principles to a debate. Indeed, as he put it to me, "I've only understood my books when I've had to go out and explain them." He aims to engage readers—"You couldn't make this up!"—not convince them. (This means that on the occasions when he assesses people sharply—Yasir Arafat, Dick Cheney, Sarah Palin—his words have particular moral force.)

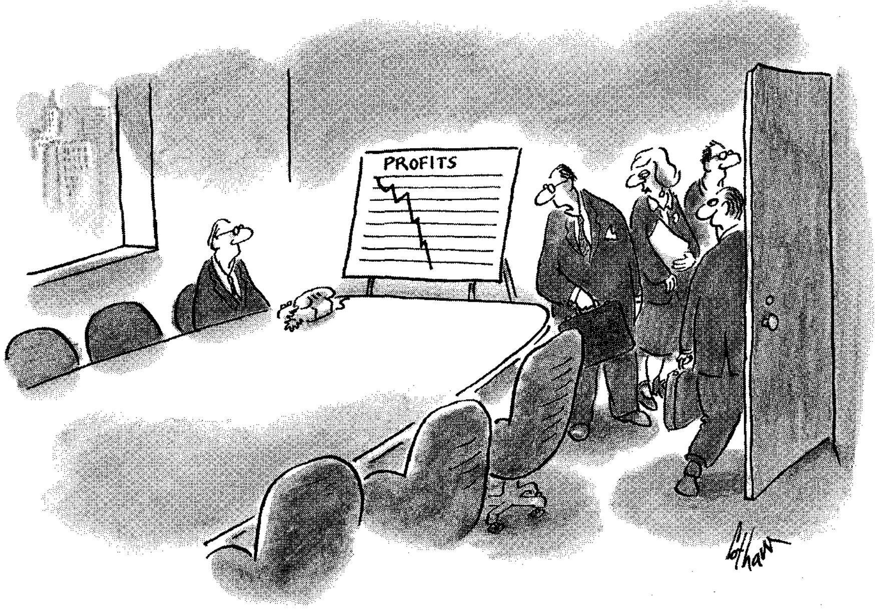
With "The Lexus and the Olive Tree" and, later, "The World Is Flat," Friedman became America's guide to globalization, and, at least in perception, its promoter. That reputation galls him. "I scratch my head and say, 'But, look, I have a whole chapter on the un-flat world!' " he said. "And I probably coined the phrase 'the backlash against globalization,' in 'The Lexus and the Olive Tree.' " His view of globalization is that, "if shaped right, it could do more good than harm"—and he wondered if readers sometimes mistook his delight in explanation for glib celebration. "It's excitement about learning and connecting dots in a way that I share with you—'Eureka!' "

Of course, the response to Friedman's ideas goes well beyond "Eureka." I recently spoke to Jordan Cohen, an executive at Pfizer, who read "The World Is Flat" on its publication, and was directly moved to set up a system that allowed Pfizer staff to outsource various office tasks—spreadsheets, PowerPoints—to contracted companies in India. This was around the time when the company was cutting ten per cent of its workforce. The book "gave me a conceptual frame, but it also gave me a list of companies and people to call," Cohen recalled.

When asked about those who have brought his writing into the workplace, Friedman said, "It's a purely intellectual exercise for me. What they're doing with it is fascinating, it's a little intimidating, but it's out of my control." Friedman is acutely aware of his strengths as a communicator, in the abstract, but is less comfortable acknowledging his real-world influence—perhaps, in part, for fear of seeming to crave power. (In our conversations, he was at pains to head off any characterization of himself as a "Davos Man" operator—"All I'm really focussed on is: Did I communicate something? That's your currency, and if you debase that you're dead as a columnist"—and made the point that he speaks only rarely to political leaders: "I've talked with Obama once in my life.") Still, Friedman's books sell in the millions, and the column runs in dozens of newspapers, including *Asharq Al-Awsat*, a leading pan-Arab daily. He is a hero to many Indians. He is waylaid in hotel lobbies around the world, including the Hotel Arctic, in Ilulissat, Greenland. State Department officials seek his attention. In 2002, in a palace in the Saudi Arabian desert, in the middle of the night, Crown Prince Abdullah revealed to Friedman a peace proposal that he planned to put before the Arab League: full normalization of relations with Israel, in exchange for its withdrawal from the occupied territories. After Friedman quoted Abdullah in a column, President Bush sent George Tenet, the director of the C.I.A., and William Burns, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, to Riyadh to discuss the idea. David Rothkopf, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, included Friedman in "Superclass," his recent study of what he calls a "global élite" of about six thousand people—"people who have the ability to influence millions of lives across borders on a regular basis." Friedman, he told me, "is one of a very few journalists I can think of who definitely meet that definition."

Friedman understood the political and cultural context of Iraq well, but the prospect of war required him to make a choice—yes or no—and this did not come naturally. He knew that the judgment, once made, would become separated from its analytical roots. (In the event, that process was assisted by a clumsy comment Friedman made to Charlie Rose in May, 2003: he said, approvingly, that the American presence in Iraq was akin to saying "Suck on this" to Islamic terrorists.) One can see a parallel, here, with Friedman's judgment about globalization—but that issue was never as bleakly binary, nor did it have the same immediate moral weight. Besides, the matter could be revisited: Friedman's later editions of "The World Is Flat" answered critics and reframed the issue. Similarly, when a world financial meltdown immediately followed the publication of "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" —"Hot, flat, crowded, and busted," as Friedman put it to me, wanly—he was able to start thinking of new ways for American dollars to reach the energy-technology industry, given the disappearance of venture capital, and of corporate appetite for risk. ("Green the Bailout" was a recent column headline.) The conversation could continue.

But the Iraq war was a different kind of conversation, and an adjustment—"Iraq 2.0" or "Iraq 3.0"—was not an option. It's against that background that Friedman can at times sound confounded by his Iraq-war critics, some of whom, scornful of his ability always to see at least a glimmer of future hope, began referring in 2006 to a "Friedman Unit": a period of six months, starting at the present, during which events in Iraq would prove decisive. In his dressing room at the Letterman show, he said, "My first column in Iraq was 'Hold Your Applause.' It's not like I've been sitting there on Fox News, saying it's all going great. I've basically been a critic since Day One." Indeed, in April, 2003, the journalist Andrew Sullivan, who was at the time largely supportive of the Bush Administration, criticized Friedman, saying, "You have to ask yourselves what it would take to get Tom Friedman and Maureen Dowd to say anything, *anything*, positive about this administration and the military force they have just wielded so expertly.”



“You stay and answer the phone.”

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Should Friedman have foreseen that the war would be waged incompetently? “To that extent, yes, I really screwed up,” he said. “Because you can’t believe in the war and not believe in the people who carried it out. But I feel that’s also a little bit of a cop-out, that’s why I haven’t done it: ‘It’s not my fault. It’s all Bush’s fault.’ My decision was based on a real analysis about the politics of that part of the world, and how it’s going to affect us.” He was speaking with passion; members of the “Late Show” staff, with clipboards and headsets, waited in the doorway. Friedman seemed to see himself in two roles, as a reporter and as an actor in the policy process: “I was walking a really fine line between saying, ‘This is not working, O.K., and you guys need to change and we need more troops,’ and not wanting to say, ‘It’s all your fault.’ I was part of the discussion, part of the idea—where my ideas stopped and theirs started, I don’t know. I felt responsible and I felt terrible about what was happening. I *feel* responsible. But I don’t feel sorry for believing that we need to find a way to collaborate with people to give birth to a different politics in that part of the world.”

On a monitor in the corner of the dressing room, we could see that the “Late Show” taping had begun. Letterman, holding up a copy of “Hot, Flat, and Crowded,” was saying, “*He’s* optimistic. I’m not. I think it’s too late. I mean, how many hurricanes have we had in the last week? What, twenty? Twenty-five? . . . We are walking dead people.”

A microphone was clipped to Friedman’s lapel. As polite effort was made to move him into the corridor, Friedman spoke of the tentative gains in Iraq in recent months. “Now we’re in a phase where there may be a decent outcome,” he said. “It’s *possible*. I’m saying ‘decent,’ not ‘democratic.’ Let it play out. I mean, I’ve got the rest of my life to apologize. Let’s see how it all plays out.”

Walter Lippmann, the great philosopher-columnist of mid-century American journalism, after visiting Greece in the mid-nineteen-fifties, made a breezy note in his diary: “Saw the King, the prime minister, etc—the usual people.” This summer, when Friedman visited Denmark—on his way to and from Greenland—he had coffee at the home of the leader of the opposition, and had breakfast with Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Prime Minister, at his out-of-town residence. And in a private room in an art museum, with a view of Sweden across dark, choppy water, Denmark’s most senior energy industrialists were brought together for a lunch. (“For the next six months, or six years, they’ll be name-dropping,” the Danish official who had arranged the lunch said. “It’ll be ‘I just recently had lunch with Tom Friedman.’ ”)

One afternoon, the director of Copenhagen’s Royal Library, wearing sandals over socks, gave Friedman and his wife a tour of the institution. The tour ended in a room where four treasured documents had been laid out, including Hans Christian Andersen’s diaries, in tiny brown type (“They’d call it a blog today,” Friedman said); a manuscript of Kierkegaard’s “Either/Or”; and the diary of Jorgen Bronlund, the Arctic explorer, which was found with his body after his death, in Greenland, in 1907. “In my case, they’ll find my memory stick,” Friedman said.

The fourth document was a typewritten draft of “Out of Africa,” the memoir by Karen Blixen (who wrote in English), and this was the text that excited Friedman. “My all-time favorite movie,” he said. Crouching over it, he asked if he could touch the pages, and then began looking for a passage. After several long minutes, he found the melancholy description of the death of Denys Finch Hatton, Blixen’s lover, and began to read aloud: “When he had started in his car, and had turned the drive, he came back to look for a volume of poems that he had given me, and that he now wanted with him on the journey.” Flipping ahead: “Suddenly the aeroplane swayed, got into a spin and came down like a bird swooping.” Friedman kept reading, for several minutes. The archivist stood stiffly beside him, and the director looked a little awkward. Friedman’s eyes had dampened.

Afterward, I asked Friedman about the appeal of Blixen’s story. “I would have liked to have been a district governor in Africa or India during that interwar period,” he said. Friedman, accustomed to speaking in the exact form previously used in print or speech, noted that he hadn’t thought this through before. “Science and industry were developed enough that there were trains and planes—that is, you could get places relatively easy—but they were still totally unspoiled and cultures hadn’t been polluted. That period, I’ve always loved.” Some personal nostalgia seemed to be mixed into his rhapsody, some weighing of a reporter’s life against a life in opinion. “There was that sense you could explore. There was a sense of discovery. Who can discover anything anymore?” ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

SUFFERING SOULS

The search for the roots of psychopathy.

BY JOHN SEABROOK

The Western New Mexico Correctional Facility sits in high-desert country about seventy miles west of Albuquerque. Grants, a former uranium boomtown that depends heavily on prison work, is a few miles down the road. There's a glassed-in room at the top of the prison tower, with louvred windows and, on the ceiling, a big crank that operates a searchlight. In a box on the floor are some tear-gas shells that can be fired down into the yard should there be a riot. Below is the prison complex—a series of low six-sided buildings, divided by high hurricane fences topped with razor wire that glitters fiercely in the desert sun. To the east is the snow-covered peak of Mt. Taylor, the highest in the region; to the west, the Zuni Mountains are visible in the blue distance.

One bright morning last April, Dr. Kent Kiehl strode across the parking lot to the entrance, saying, "I guarantee that by the time we reach the gate the entire inmate population will know I'm here." Kiehl—the Doc, as the inmates call him—was dressed in a blue blazer and a yellow tie. He is tall, broad-shouldered, and barrel-chested, with neat brown hair and small ears; he looks more like a college football player, which was his first ambition, than like a cognitive neuroscientist. But when he speaks, in an unexpectedly high-pitched voice, he becomes that know-it-all kid in school who intimidated you with his combination of superior knowledge and bluster.

At thirty-eight, Kiehl is one of the world's leading younger investigators in psychopathy, the condition of moral emptiness that affects between fifteen to twenty-five per cent of the North American prison population, and is believed by some psychologists to exist in one per cent of the general adult male population. (Female psychopaths are thought to be much rarer.) Psychopaths don't exhibit the manias, hysterias, and neuroses that are present in other types of mental illness. Their main defect, what psychologists call "severe emotional detachment"—a total lack of empathy and remorse—is concealed, and harder to describe than the symptoms of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. This absence of easily readable signs has led to debate among mental-health practitioners about what qualifies as psychopathy and how to diagnose it. Psychopathy isn't identified as a disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the American Psychiatric Association's canon; instead, a more general term, "antisocial personality disorder," known as A.P.D., covers the condition.

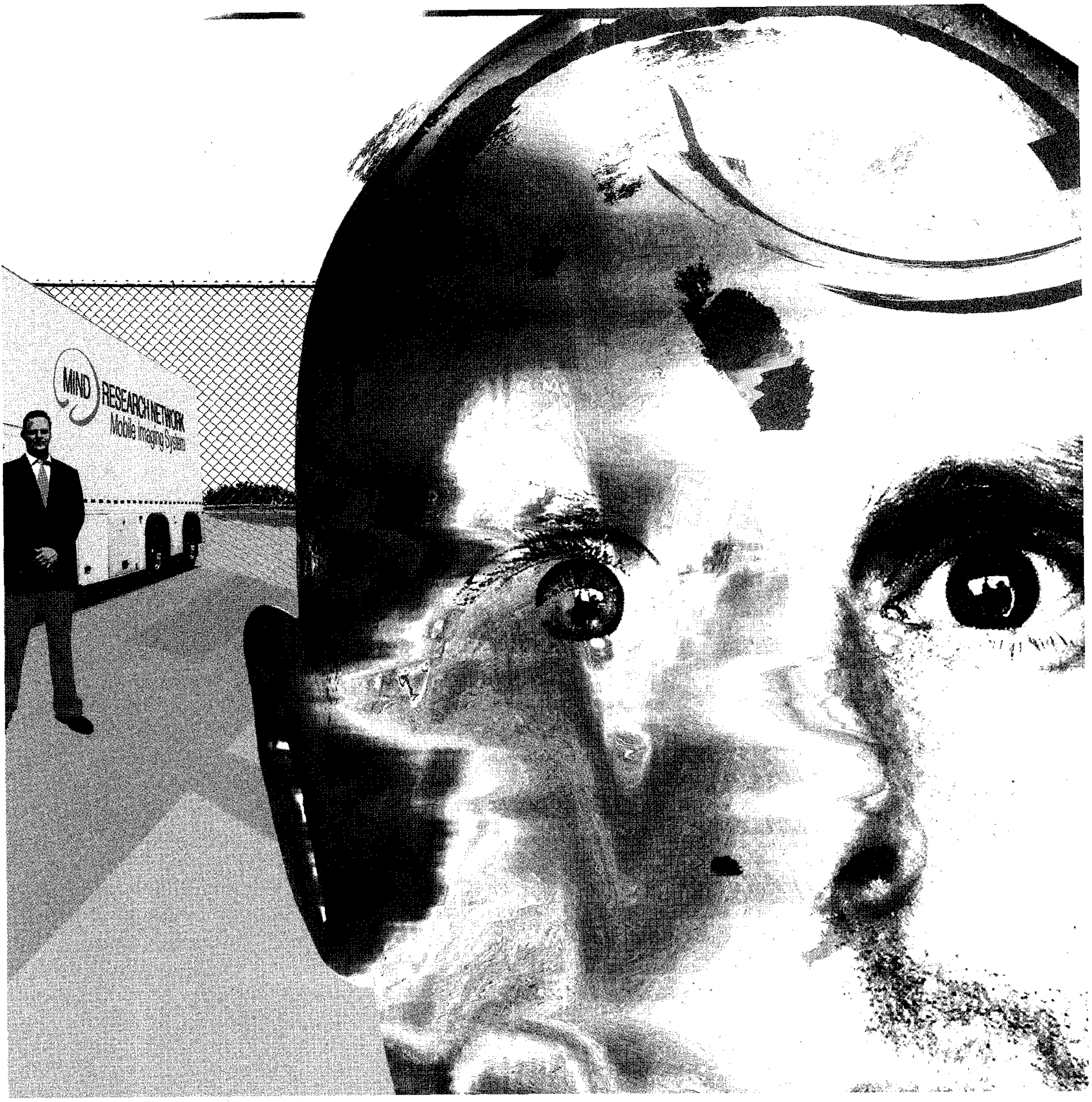
There is also little consensus among researchers about what causes psychopathy. Considerable evidence, including several large-scale studies of twins, points toward a genetic component. Yet psychopaths are more likely to come from neglectful families than from loving, nurturing ones. Psychopathy could be dimensional, like high blood pressure, or it might be categorical, like leukemia. Researchers argue over whether tests used to measure it should focus on behavior or attempt to incorporate personality traits—like deceitfulness, glibness, and lack of remorse—as well. The only point on which everyone agrees is that psychopathy is extremely difficult to treat. And for some researchers the word "psychopath" has been tainted by its long and seamy relationship with criminality and popular culture, which began with true-crime pulps and continues today in TV shows like CBS's "Criminal Minds" and in the work of authors like Thomas Harris and Patricia Cornwell. The word is so loaded with baleful connotations that it tends to empurple any surrounding prose.

Kiehl is frustrated by the lack of respect shown to psychopathy by the mental-health establishment. "Think about it," he told me. "Crime is a trillion-dollar-a-year problem. The average psychopath will be convicted of four violent crimes by the age of forty. And yet hardly anyone is funding research into the science. Schizophrenia, which causes much less crime, has a hundred times more research money devoted to it." I asked why, and Kiehl said, "Because schizophrenics are seen as victims, and psychopaths are seen as predators. The former we feel empathy for, the latter we lock up."

In January of 2007, Kiehl arranged to have a portable functional magnetic-resonance-imaging scanner brought into Western—the first fMRI ever installed in a prison. So far, he has recruited hundreds of volunteers from among the inmates. The data from these scans, Kiehl hopes, will confirm his theory, published in *Psychiatry Research*, in 2006, that psychopathy is caused by a defect in what he calls "the paralimbic system," a network of brain regions, stretching from the orbital frontal cortex to the posterior cingulate cortex, that are involved in processing emotion, inhibition, and attentional control. His dream is to confound the received wisdom by helping to discover a treatment for psychopathy. "If you could target the brain region involved, then maybe you could find a drug that treats that region," he told me. "If you could treat just five per cent of them, that would be a Nobel Prize right there."

The four hundred and six prisoners in the Western New Mexico facility are serving sentences ranging from a year to life without parole. New Mexico uses a classification system that assigns each inmate a number from one to six, with six being reserved for the most violent offenders; Western has inmates of all levels up to five. Although not all psychopaths are violent, Kiehl told me, the majority are fours, fives, and sixes.

Unlike most academic psychopathy researchers, Kiehl has spent many hours in the company of his subjects. When he meets colleagues at conferences, he told me, "they always ask, 'What are they



Dr. Kent Kiehl uses MRI technology to scan prison inmates for signs of pyschopathy in the hope of discovering a treatment.

JOHN RITTER

like?' These are guys who have spent twenty years studying psychopaths and never met one." Although the number of psychopaths who are not in prisons is thought to exceed the number who are—if the one-per-cent figure is correct, there are more than a million psychopaths at large in the United States alone—they are much harder to identify in the outside world. Some are "successful psychopaths," holding down good jobs in many types of industries. It is generally only if they commit a crime and enter the criminal-justice system that they become available for research.

In the conference room where Western's warden, Anthony Romero, greeted Kiehl, there was a framed tableau of illegal items confiscated from inmates, including handmade shivs and crude tattooing devices. Romero explained that Kiehl was using the scanner not only to study psychopathy but also to measure the level of craving in the brains of substance abusers as they go through a treatment program, also run by Kiehl, which is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The volunteer rate among the inmates is more than ninety per cent (although some are too muscle-bound to fit inside the scanning tube). As a "collateral benefit," Kiehl throws in a free clinical examination of their brains. (He has discovered previously undetected tumors in about five per cent of the volunteers.) In addition to the pay they receive for their time (a dollar an hour, Western's standard rate for prison labor), inmates get pictures of their brains that they can post in their cells. "There's a lot of joking among the prisoners about who's got the biggest brain," Romero said.

The scanner was housed in a tractor-trailer parked behind the prison's I.D. center. We followed a correctional officer

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through an internal courtyard to the rehab wing, which consisted of a large common area surrounded by two-man cells. The prisoners were standing at attention outside their cells, some holding mops and brooms. I entered a vacant cell and saw the occupant's brain, a grainy black-and-white image on a piece of a paper, its edges curling, tacked up over the desk.

Then we walked through the common room and out a door at the other end, passing under a large poster with lines that read, "I am here because there is no refuge, finally, from myself." The officer led us along a corridor of offices in which students from the University of New Mexico, where Kiehl is on the faculty, conduct psychopathy interviews and also counsel participants in the drug-treatment program. Carla Harenski, one of Kiehl's postdocs, was interviewing a beefy guy with a tattoo on his neck. Her office, like those of all the researchers in the lab, is equipped with a button she can press to call for help if an interview gets out of hand.

In order to distinguish psychopaths from non-psychopaths among the Western volunteers, Kiehl and his students use the revised version of the Psychopathy Checklist, or PCL-R, a twenty-item diagnostic instrument created by Robert Hare, a Canadian psychologist, based on his long experience in working with psychopaths in prisons. Kiehl was taught to use the checklist by Hare himself, under whom he earned his doctorate, at the University of British Columbia. Researchers interview an inmate for up to three hours, and compare the inmate's statements against what is known of his record and his personal history. The interviewer "scores" the subject on each of the twenty items—parasitic life style, pathological lying, conning, proneness to boredom, shallow emotions, lack of empathy, poor impulse control, promiscuity, irresponsibility, record of juvenile delinquency, and criminal versatility, among other tendencies—with zero, one, or two, depending on how pronounced that trait is. Most researchers agree that anyone who scores thirty or higher on the PCL-R is considered to be a psychopath. Kiehl says, "Someone who scores a thirty-five, a thirty-six, they are just different. You say to yourself, 'Aha, here you are. You are why I do this.'"

Harenski recently interviewed a Western inmate who scored a 38.9. "He had killed his girlfriend because he thought she was cheating on him," she told me. "He was so charming about telling it that I found it hard not to fall into laughing along in surprise, even when he was describing awful things." Harenski, who is thirty, did not experience the involuntary skin-crawling sensation that, according to a survey conducted by the psychologists Reid and M. J. Meloy, one in three mental-health and criminal-justice professionals report feeling on interviewing a psychopath; in their paper on the subject, Meloy and Meloy speculate that this reaction may be an ancient intraspecies predator-response system. "I was just excited," Harenski continued. "I was saying to myself, 'Wow. I found a real one.'"

At the end of the hall, a door led outside to the trailer. Inside, there was a small sitting area; computer screens and hard drives were built into a large console in the center, and the fMRI scanning tube was at the back. Its surfaces were made of molded white plastic. Harenski's husband, Keith, the chief MRI technician in Kiehl's lab, sat in front of the computer, monitoring a scan in progress. The screen showed what the inmate inside the scanner was seeing. All that was visible of him was his feet, covered with dirty white athletic socks, which protruded from the mouth of the tube.

Kiehl and the researchers in his lab have designed two tests—or tasks, as the researchers call them—one word-based and the other image-based. Kiehl said he had avoided complicated moral problems, such as the classic trolley dilemma, in which the subject is asked to choose whether to cause one person's death in order to save the lives of others in the path of a runaway trolley, because psychopaths might not understand the problem or wouldn't answer seriously. "You try to minimize their opportunities for messing with you," he said. The same tasks are performed by control groups, one of non-psychopathic inmates and another of non-inmates with intelligence-test scores and educational backgrounds similar to those of the inmates.

The word-based task was under way. The inmate was being shown a series of words and phrases, and was supposed to rate each as morally offensive or not. There were three kinds of phrases: some were intended as obvious moral violations, like "having sex with your mother"; some were ambiguous, like "abortion"; and some were morally neutral, like "listening to others." The computer software captured not only the inmate's response but also the speed with which he made his judgment. The imaging technology recorded which part of the brain was involved in making the decision and how active the neurons there were.

Neurons in the brain consume oxygen when they are "firing," and the oxygen is replenished by iron-laden hemoglobin cells in the blood. The scanner's magnet temporarily aligns these iron molecules in the hemoglobin cells, while the imaging technology captures a rapid series of "slices"—tiny cross-sections of the brain. The magnet is superconductive, which means it operates at very cold temperatures (minus two hundred and sixty-nine degrees Celsius). The machine has a helium cooling system, but if the system fails the magnet will "quench." Quenches are an MRI technician's worst fear; a new magnet costs about two million dollars.

The inmate wore a helmet with a head coil for receiving magnetic data and, on the inside, a screen on which words were projected. A sensor measured "skin conductance"—palm sweat. During the functional imaging scans, there was a series of high-pitched beeps, then a loud drilling sound. And during the brain-anatomy scans the machine made a low, rapid thumping, like a metal heartbeat. As the inmate's brain was scanned, he crossed his feet at the ankles and then uncrossed them. His toes wiggled.

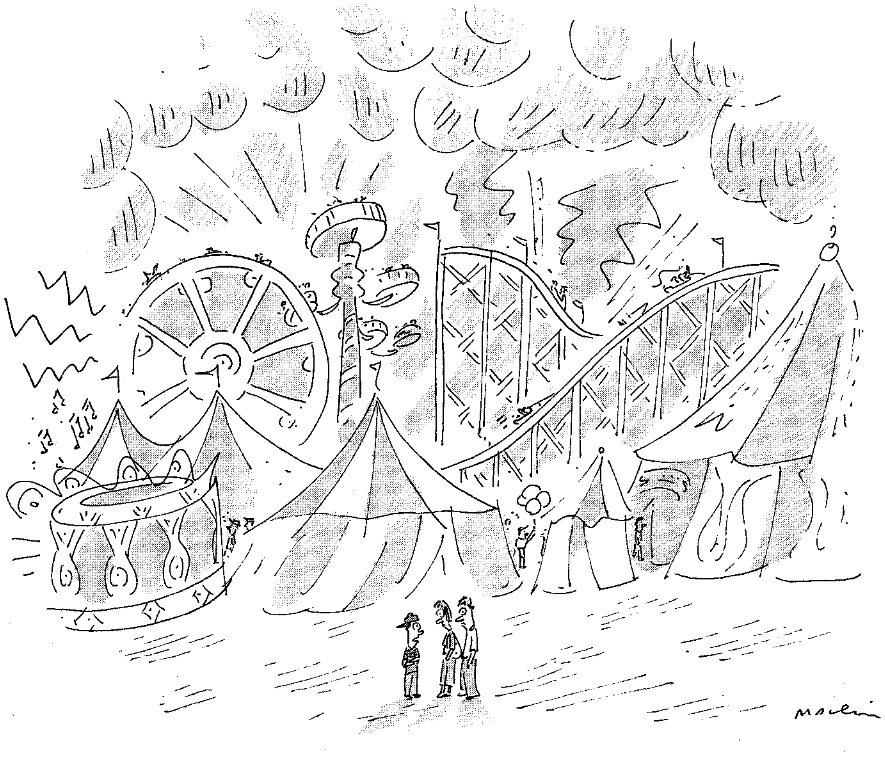
Psychopaths are as old as Cain, and they are believed to exist in all cultures, although they are more prevalent in individualistic societies in the West. The Yupik Eskimos use the term *kunlangeta* to describe a man who repeatedly lies, cheats, steals, and takes sexual advantage of women, according to a 1976 study by Jane M. Murphy, an anthropologist then at Harvard University. She asked an Eskimo what the group would typically do with a *kunlangeta*, and he replied, "Somebody would have pushed him off the ice when nobody else was looking."

The condition was first described clinically in 1801, by the French surgeon Philippe Pinel. He called it "mania without delirium." In the early nineteenth century, the American surgeon Benjamin Rush wrote about a type of "moral derangement" in which the sufferer was neither delusional nor psychotic but nevertheless engaged in profoundly antisocial behavior, including horrifying acts of violence. Rush noted that the condition appeared early in life. The term "moral insanity" became popular in the mid-nineteenth century, and was widely used in the U.S. and in England to describe incorrigible criminals. The word "psychopath" (literally, "suffering soul") was coined in Germany in the eighteen-eighties. By the nineteen-twenties, "constitutional psychopathic inferiority" had become the catchall phrase psychiatrists used for a general mixture of violent and antisocial characteristics found in irredeemable criminals, who appeared to lack a conscience.

In the late nineteen-thirties, an American psychiatrist named Hervey Cleckley began collecting data on a certain kind of patient he encountered in the course of his work in a psychiatric hospital in Augusta, Georgia. These people were from varied social and family backgrounds. Some were poor, but others were sons of Augusta's most prosperous and respected families. Cleckley set about sharpening the vague construct of constitutional psychopathic inferiority, and distinguishing it from other forms of mental illness. He eventually isolated sixteen traits exhibited by patients he called "primary" psychopaths; these included being charming and intelligent, unreliable, dishonest, irresponsible, self-centered, emotionally shallow, and lacking in empathy and insight.

"Beauty and ugliness, except in a very superficial sense, goodness, evil, love, horror, and humor have no actual meaning, no power to move him," Cleckley wrote of the psychopath in his 1941 book, "The Mask of Sanity," which became the foundation of the modern science. The psychopath talks "entertainingly," Cleckley explained, and is "brilliant and charming," but nonetheless "carries disaster lightly in each hand." Cleckley emphasized his subjects' deceptive, predatory nature, writing that the psychopath is capable of "concealing behind a perfect mimicry of normal emotion, fine intelligence, and social responsibility a grossly disabled and irresponsible personality." This mimicry allows psychopaths to function, and even thrive, in normal society. Indeed, as Cleckley also argued, the individualistic, winner-take-all aspect of American culture nurtures psychopathy.

The psychiatric profession wanted little to do with psychopathy, for several reasons. For one thing, it was thought to be incurable. Not only did the talking cure fail with psychopaths but several studies suggested that talk therapy made the condition worse, by enabling psychopaths to practice the art of manipulation. There were no valid instruments to measure the personality traits that were commonly associated with the condition; researchers could study only the



"I'm bored."

psychopaths' behavior, in most cases through their criminal records. Finally, the emphasis in the word "psychopath" on an internal sickness was at odds with liberal mid-century social thought, which tended to look for external causes of social deviancy; "sociopath," coined in 1930 by the psychologist G. E. Partridge, became the preferred term. In 1958, the American Psychiatric Association used the term "sociopathic personality" to describe the disorder in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. In the 1968 edition, the condition was renamed "general antisocial personality disorder."

Cleckley's book fell out of favor, and Cleckley described himself late in life as "a voice crying in the wilderness." When he died, in 1984, he was remembered mostly for his popular study of multiple-personality disorder, written with Corbett Thigpen, "The Three Faces of Eve."

In 1960, Robert Hare took a job as the resident psychologist in a maximum-security prison about twenty miles outside Vancouver. On his first day, a tall, slim, dark-haired inmate came into his office and said, "Hey, Doc, how's it going? Look, I've got a problem. I need your help." Hare later wrote of this encounter, "The air around him seemed to buzz, and the eye contact he made with me was so direct and intense that I wondered if I had ever really looked anybody in the eye before." Hare asked the inmate, whom he called Ray in his account, to tell him about his problem. "In response, he pulled out a knife and waved it in front of my nose, all the while smiling and maintaining that intense eye contact," Hare wrote in his 1993 book, "Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us." Ray said he was planning to use the knife on another inmate, who was making overtures to his " 'protégé,' a prison term for the more passive member of a homosexual pairing." Ray never harmed Hare, but he successfully manipulated him throughout Hare's eight months at the prison, and two and a half years later, after Hare had joined the faculty at the University of British Columbia, Ray, now paroled, tried to register there with a forged transcript.

Hare wasn't familiar with the psychopathy literature when he was working at the prison. Later that year, he moved with his family to London, Ontario, where he pursued a Ph.D. at the University of Western Ontario. (When his brakes failed at the first steep hill on the trip east, he recalled that Ray had worked on his car in the prison garage.) His dissertation was on the effects of punishment on human learning and performance. One day in the library, he came across "The Mask of Sanity." Reading Cleckley's case histories put Hare in mind of Ray, and of other types he had encountered in the maximum-security prison. Were these men psychopaths? Over the next year, Hare read not only Cleckley but also the early literature Cleckley had synthesized. After receiving his doctorate, in 1963, and returning to Vancouver, he set about what would be his life's work: the study of psychopathy, and the creation of the Psychopathy Checklist, the twenty-item diagnostic instrument that Kiehl is using at Western.

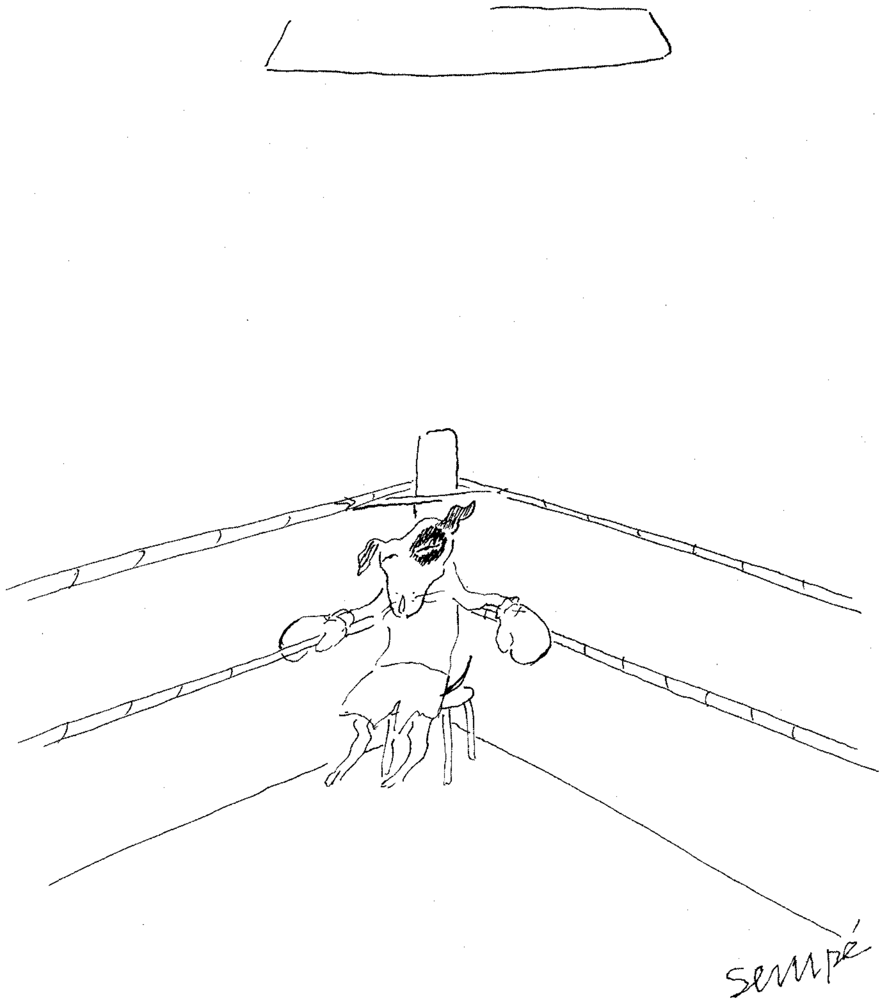
Thanks to the checklist, scientists working in different places can be confident that the subjects they are studying are taxonomically similar. The PCL also has a wide variety of forensic applications. It is employed throughout Canada in parole-board hearings and is gaining popularity in the U.S. In the thirty-seven states that allow the death penalty, a high psychopathy score is often used by prosecutors as an "aggravating factor" in the penalty phase of capital cases. Psychopathy scores have also been used in child-custody cases; a high score may result in one parent's loss of custody. Hare's influence on the field of psychopathy is profound. Today, Hare's former students hold important administrative positions throughout the Canadian prison system, and are prominently represented in the next two generations of psychopathy researchers around the world.

One day when Kent Kiehl was eight years old, his father, Jeff, a copy editor at the Tacoma *News Tribune*, came home talking about a local man named Ted Bundy. "This was a guy who had grown up just down the street," Kiehl told me, "and he had supposedly killed all these women." Bundy, whose family moved to Tacoma when he was a child, is known to have sexually assaulted and murdered at least thirty women in the nineteen-seventies. But to outward appearances he was an exceptionally promising young man. He had received glowing letters of recommendation both from a psychology professor at the University of Washington, where he was an undergraduate ("he is exceedingly bright, personable, highly motivated, and conscientious"), and from the Republican governor of Washington, Dan Evans, for whom he worked. His good looks, charm, and verbal skills—qualities that made him such an effective predator—convinced many in the Tacoma community that he was innocent, up until the time he was convicted of murder and sentenced to death, in 1979. Bundy was executed in Florida in 1989.

Kiehl's father was a sports fanatic, but he suffered from a form of muscular dystrophy that made it difficult for him to walk. (He died when Kiehl was twenty-two.) "My dad's greatest wish for me was that I play college football," Kiehl told me. Kent fantasized about playing for the University of Washington Huskies in front of fifty thousand fans. He ended up at the University of California at Davis, where he played in front of a couple of thousand. He enrolled as a pre-med, planning to be a doctor, but was having trouble balancing his academic and athletic commitments. When he blew out his knee at the start of his sophomore year, his choice became clear.

Kiehl had taken a course in psychology under Debra Long, a professor specializing in psycholinguistics, who was also his academic adviser, and he had enjoyed the work they did on emotional processing and the brain. Long asked what inspired him, Kiehl recalled. "I said I want to understand why people do bad things—how someone could get to be like Ted Bundy—and I want to study the brain. So she said, 'You should combine those two things and study psychopaths.' " Kiehl's first published paper was based on data collected from four hundred and eighty-five undergraduates at U.C. Davis, to whom he distributed a psychopathy checklist adapted from Hare, which they filled out themselves. He found that a high proportion of psychopathic traits were remarkably consistent with a pattern of disruptive behavior.

Kiehl's early training in psychopathology coincided with the emergence of functional neuroimaging; Kiehl, a techie, quickly became adept at the computer skills necessary to run experiments. The earliest technique, measuring what's known as an event-related potential, or E.R.P., charts the brain's electrical activity, using an electrode-studded skullcap. In a landmark 1991 E.R.P. study conducted at a prison in Vancouver, Robert Hare and two graduate students showed that psychopaths process words like "hate" and "love" differently from the way normal people do. In another study, at the Bronx V.A. Medical Center, Hare, Joanne Intrator, and others found that psychopaths processed emotional words in a different part of the brain. Instead of showing activity in the limbic region, in the midbrain, which is the emotional-processing center, psychopaths showed activity only in the front of the brain, in the language center. Hare explained to me, "It was as if they could only understand emotions linguistically. They knew the words but not the music, as it were."



Since then, cognitive neuroscience has come to be dominated by brain scans, although they are not as widely used in psychopathy research. So far, fMRI studies of psychopaths have only reinforced different models of psychopathy that were in place before fMRI became popular, theories that Kiehl studied while pursuing a doctorate in Hare's lab at the University of British Columbia. Some scientists think that psychopaths suffer from an extreme and far-reaching attention deficit, which causes them temporarily to forget the moral and social consequences of certain antisocial actions. Joseph Newman, who chairs the psychology department at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, is the leading advocate of this theory. His model is based on traditional research methods, such as lab work using rats with brain lesions, and studies of humans using a well-known card-playing task, in which players gradually start to lose money; the players in the control group stopped as their earnings diminished, but the psychopaths could focus only on the outcome of the next card choice. Another hypothesis is that psychopaths lack fear of personal injury and, more important, moral fear—fear of punishment. David Lykken pioneered this theory in the nineteen-fifties, and it has been taken up by James Blair, Christopher Patrick, and others. The updated version of this model posits that psychopathy is a result of a dysfunction of the amygdala, the almond-shaped bundle of gray matter situated in the midbrain, which is another area instrumental in emotional processing.

When Kiehl arrived at the University of British Columbia, Hare sent him to a new maximum-security prison nearby. Kiehl recalled, "Bob said, 'There is this new prison that just opened up, with the worst of the worst offenders—you can work there.' So I submitted my proposal to do E.R.P. studies, and met with the prison psychiatrist, whose name was Johann Brink. He said, 'I got you this office over here, here are your keys, and there are the inmates'—that was my training. They open the door, and there are fifty guys with tattoos looking at me. My first week, I interviewed a serial killer. He told me he had killed sixteen people and described how he had chopped them up—and I am sitting right across the table from the guy."

Kiehl's most memorable "perfect forty" on a PCL was an inmate I'll call George. Kiehl was at the prison on the morning that George arrived. After being processed, George stripped naked and walked around the track outside the cellblock in the pouring rain. "I was new here," he later explained to Kiehl, "and I wanted to establish right away that I am a crazy motherfucker so leave me alone." George described his criminal past in full detail. He started out committing petty crimes as a child and by seventeen had been convicted of arson. In the early nineties, after serving eighteen months in prison for breaking and entering, he moved back in with his mother. One day, the two had a fight, and his mother picked up the phone to call the cops. "Man, can you believe the balls on that chick?" George asked Kiehl. He wrapped the phone cord around his mother's neck and strangled her. "Then I threw her down the basement stairs, but I wasn't sure she was dead, so I got a kitchen knife and stabbed her, and her body made these weird noises, I guess gas escaping, but I wasn't sure, so I grabbed a big propane cannister and bashed her brains in." Then he went out and partied for three days. "When I came back, that house stank—what a stench." He cleaned the whole basement with bleach, wrapped up his mother's body, put it in the trunk of her car, and drove to the mountains.

On the way, a policeman stopped him and asked if he was drunk. George said that he was just looking for a place to pee. So the cop pointed him toward a dirt road, and George went up there and left the body in the woods. It turned out he had dumped his mother in a mountain-pine-beetle-infested area, and a forestry crew came across the body a few days later. "Fucking pine beetles," George remarked. At first, the police couldn't find any evidence in the house, but George had neglected to clean the propane tank, which was splattered with his mother's blood. When he was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to life imprisonment, George just smiled.

Kiehl would have loved to scan George's brain. But transporting inmates from prisons to fMRI machines, which tend to be in hospitals and neuroscience centers, was complicated and expensive; elaborate security measures had to be taken to insure the safety of the staff and to prevent the subjects from escaping. Throughout his career, Kiehl has been frustrated by the difficulty of scanning offenders, and the tiny data samples scientists have to work with. "You want to have eight hundred subjects, not eight," he said. In eight years as a graduate student at U.B.C., Kiehl was able to scan only about fifty inmates, and in seven subsequent years as an associate professor at Yale University he scanned about two hundred former inmates, but only a few were high scorers on the PCL.

Kiehl had had a remedy in mind since 1993, when, on a freeway in Vancouver, he passed a truck that had the words "Mobile MRI Unit" written on the side. "Right away, I thought, Man, how great would it be to have one of these things in a prison," Kiehl said. At the time, he had little hope of securing the two to three million dollars that the scanner would cost. Finally, in 2006, the University of New Mexico approached him about moving his lab to Albuquerque. Kiehl was given an associate professorship at the university, and a position as the principal investigator at the Mind Research Network, a neuroscience center in Albuquerque, which paid for a portable scanner to be built to his specifications by Siemens, in Germany. In January, 2007, the machine was installed at the Western New Mexico Correctional Facility, and, with the help of a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, Kiehl began scanning. "So far, we've scanned more than five hundred inmates in more than a thousand total sessions," he told me. "In four months I've scanned twice as many psychopaths as in my whole previous career."

Today, Kiehl and Hare have a complementary but complicated relationship. Kiehl claims Hare as a mentor, and sees his own work as validating Hare's checklist, by advancing a neurological mechanism for psychopathy. Hare is less gung ho about using fMRI as a diagnostic tool. "Some claim, in a sense, this is the new phrenology," Hare said, referring to the discredited nineteenth-century practice of reading the bumps on people's heads, "only this time the bumps are on the inside." (Hare himself is a "strong proponent" of brain-imaging technology, but he noted that scans in isolation will always be insufficient.) Hare sees himself as a generalist, and Kiehl as "more of a data-driven guy." Hare added that, while Kiehl's brashness sometimes puts people off, "that's why Kent gets things done."

"It's election season—don't believe everything you see."

Robert Hare is bearded and slight, and has a detached, feline manner. He is in his early seventies, and his position at the University of British Columbia is emeritus. I met him in May, at a Homewood Suites hotel in Albany, where he was conducting a two-day seminar in psychopathy and the use of the checklist, sponsored by the New York State Office of Mental Health's Bureau of Sex Offender Education and Treatment. A substantial percentage of sex offenders are psychopaths. New York State recently began creating special programs housed in psychiatric facilities for sex offenders who have completed their prison terms but are judged too dangerous to release.

Hare's Psychopathy Checklist now exists in three variations. (There's one for juveniles, the PCL-JV, and one designed for the general population—the "screening" version.) He collects a royalty fee every time the official PCL scoring sheet is used. The complete psychopathy kit, which includes a book-length manual on how to administer the checklist, costs two hundred and sixty-three dollars. It has been translated into more than twenty languages. The Albany seminar was one of roughly half a dozen that Hare conducts each year. He was giving a talk on psychopathy and culpability in Las Vegas the following week; then he was off to Rome, to instruct the carabinieri in the use of the checklist, and in profiling psychopaths. In Albany, his audience was composed mostly of psychologists and other mental-health professionals.

Hare sees himself as continuing the work that Cleckley started—warning society of a devastating and costly mental disorder that it mostly continues to ignore. Hare's forensic experience has taught him that psychopathy is of vital concern to mental-health workers in prisons as well as to people in law enforcement and on parole boards; people who come into daily contact with dangerous and destructive individuals need an instrument that will allow them to identify psychopaths and make risk assessments based on their predictive behavior. (According to several national and international studies, psychopathic criminal offenders are three times more likely to return to prison within a year of their release.) Mary Ellen O'Toole, one of the F.B.I.'s top criminal profilers, whose job is "to investigate the most extreme and violent crimes from all over the world, including serial murders, serial rapes, child abductions, school shootings, workplace violence, domestic homicides, and other crimes of extreme and/or bizarre violence," told me that she uses her psychopathy training, some of which came under Hare, when she is investigating crime scenes. She looks for evidence of, "for example, lack of remorse, thrill seeking, or impulsivity that could be consistent with the traits and characteristics of psychopathy." This information, in turn, can be useful in "the investigation, the interview, even the prosecution of the offender."

Hare wants to disassociate psychopathy from the *DSM's* catchall diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder. "It's like having pneumonia versus having a cold," he said. "They share some common symptoms, but one is much more virulent." Before the fourth edition of the *DSM* came out, in 1994, Hare published several articles pointing to field research that showed a difference between psychopathy and A.P.D. John Gunderson, the psychiatrist who chaired the personality-disorders work group for the revision, told Hare that, intellectually, he had "won the battle," Hare recalls; even so, in *DSM-IV* "psychopathy" appears only as a synonym for A.P.D. (Gunderson says this was a function of institutional inertia.) Hare has continued to follow preparations for the next edition, due out in 2012, and recently sent an e-mail to a senior member of the task force inquiring about what revisions, if any, were planned for A.P.D. The reply, Hare said, was noncommittal.

Hare has published two books that translate some of the concepts of psychopathy for a general audience and attempt to teach people how to identify the "successful psychopaths" in their midst. In the introduction to "Without Conscience," he writes, "It is very likely that at some point in your life you will come into painful contact with a psychopath. For your own physical, psychological, and financial well-being it is crucial that you know how to identify the psychopath." Among the professions likely to attract psychopaths, he writes, are law enforcement, the military, politics, and medicine, although he notes that these have norms and are self-policing. The most agreeable vocation for psychopaths, according to Hare, is business. In his second book, "Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work," written with Paul Babiack, Hare flirts with pop psychology when he points out that many traits that may be desirable in a corporate context, such as ruthlessness, lack of social conscience, and single-minded devotion to success, would be considered psychopathic outside of it.

On the evening of the first day of the seminar, Hare and I went out for dinner at Smokey Bones, a rib joint. As I sped along Wolf Road, a traffic light ahead turned yellow. I momentarily thought about flooring it, and probably would have, if not for my passenger; instead, I slowed down and stopped. But the car on my left went flying by, through what was now a red light.

"Wow, look at that," Hare said. "Now, that man might be a psychopath. That was psychopathic behavior, certainly—to put others in the intersection in danger in order to realize your own goals."

But the problem is that "psychopathic behavior"—egocentricity, for example, or lack of realistic long-term goals—is present in far more than one per cent of the adult male population. This blurriness in the psychopathic profile can make it possible to see psychopaths everywhere or nowhere. In the mid-fifties, Robert Lindner, the author of "Rebel Without a Cause: A Hypnoanalysis of a Criminal Psychopath," explained juvenile delinquency as an outbreak of mass psychopathy. Norman Mailer inverted this notion in "The White Negro," admiring the hipster as a "philosophical psychopath" for having the courage of nonconformity. In the sixties, sociopathy replaced psychopathy as the dominant construct. Now, in our age of genetic determinism, society is once again seeing psychopaths everywhere, and this will no doubt provoke others to say they are nowhere, and the cycle of overexposure and underfunding will continue.

Hare is urbane and well read, and during dinner he seasoned his clinical descriptions of the psychopath with references to characters from film and literature. Harry Lime, the villain played by Orson Welles in "The Third Man," is one example. "Iago was a classic psychopath," he added. "The way Shakespeare wrote him. In films and plays he is portrayed as evil-seeming, but he isn't written that way." Hare was friendly but wary of me—several times he said, "I have to see your eyeballs before I can tell you that." We talked about the checklist. "Am I happy about the way the checklist can be used?" Hare asked rhetorically. "No, not always. Am I happy it is used to help condemn people to death? No, I am not." Nor does he approve of its use in child-custody cases. However, he believes that, when properly used as a predictor of risk in forensic settings, the social benefits of the checklist far outweigh its drawbacks. Hare rejects the notion that a distinction ought to be made between a violent psychopath, like Ted Bundy, and a nonviolent one who commits financial crimes. Both, he said, are willing to do whatever it takes. He went on, "Can you say Ted Bundy caused more disaster than the guys at Enron? How many destroyed lives and suicides followed as a result of so many people losing their savings?"

During his years of teaching at U.B.C., Hare confided to me, he discovered that "it is possible for people who study psychopaths to end up becoming the victims of what you are looking for." He described how, early in his career, one of his students became sexually involved with an inmate. Prison authorities caught the student having sex with the inmate in his cell. When confronted by Hare, the student "looked me right in the eye and said, 'I didn't do it,'" he recalled. The student denied everything so convincingly that Hare began to doubt what he knew to be true.

After dinner, we went to Hare's room at the hotel and drank Scotch, while he showed me videos of psychopaths which he had on his computer. "It's their eyes that are the most remarkable feature," he said. "How they drill into you." We watched while "Bruce," a long-haired, snaggletoothed man in his forties, described how as a child he had murdered his brother. Something about the slight smile on his lips caused the muscles in my neck to tighten painfully, and the only relief was to look away from the screen.

One morning while I was in New Mexico, Kent Kiehl arranged for me to have my brain scanned. I reported to the Mind Research Network, and put on a hospital gown. I was going to perform the visual task—rate a series of images as "morally offensive," on a scale of zero to five.

I climbed onto the gurney, and a technician fitted me with a helmet that had a built-in viewer, and then slowly slid me into the coffinlike scanning tube. I fought a momentary sense of panic. In my right hand I held a push-button device that I would use to rate the offensiveness of the pictures. An iris scan, which was trained on my right eye, would record which part of the picture I was looking at when I made my judgments. The soothing voice of the MRI technician, heard over a speaker in the helmet, guided me. Carla Harenski, who was the lead designer of the task, was overseeing the procedure from the next room.

The fMRI machine started up with a high-pitched whirring sound. I began to see photographs. One was of a baby covered with blood. I thought first about the blood, then realized the circumstances—birth—and rated the moral offense zero. A man was lying on the ground with his face beaten to a bloody pulp: I scored this high. There was a picture of Osama bin Laden. I scored it four, although I felt that I was making more of an intellectual than a moral judgment. Two guys inadvertently butting heads in a soccer game got a zero, but then I changed it to a one, because perhaps a foul was called. I had considered deliberately giving wrong answers, as a psychopath might. But instead I worked at my task earnestly, like a good fifth grader.

That evening, when I met Kiehl and three of his postdocs at a restaurant near the university, I brought along my brain scan for them to examine. The Mind Research Network had burned me a disk, and I had loaded it on my laptop. "It's always good looking at your brain in a bar," Kiehl said, bringing up a center slice of my brain. "Well, it looks normal—all the parts are there." He studied the image silently for several seconds. "Your corpus callosum looks a little thin," he added. "Wait, is this a center slice? Yes, it is. Hmm. Yeah, it's thin." The corpus callosum is the slender bridge between the left and right sides of the brain.

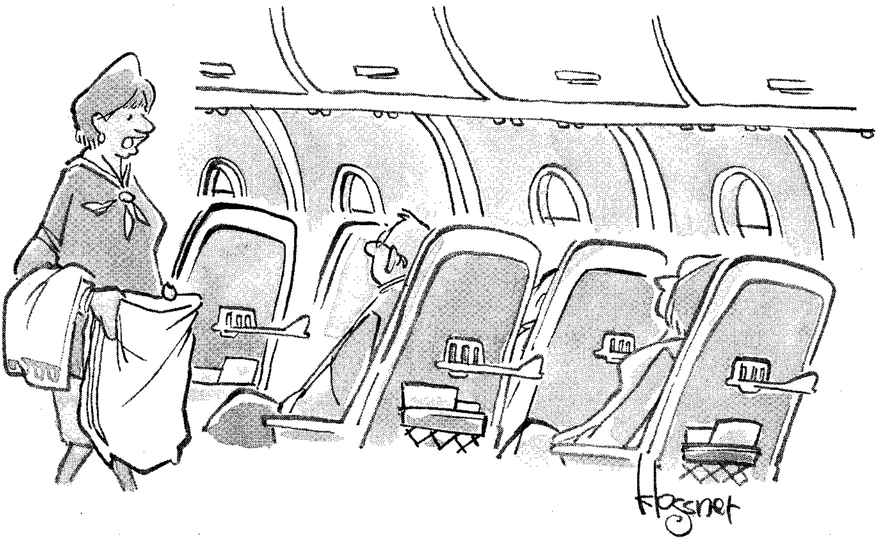
"What does that mean?" I asked.

"Not sure," Kiehl said. "We'd need a thorough case history from you to make sense of it." He said he would analyze the data and get back to me, but months passed before I heard the results. In the meantime, I questioned my moral choices with a new severity. Finally, the Doc informed me that I was O.K.

Kiehl has big plans for his portable scanner. In the summer of 2008, he moved it to a maximum-security juvenile detention facility in Albuquerque, in order to scan high-risk youths. Scanning minors is more complicated, legally, than scanning adults—both the subjects and their parents have to sign consent forms—but Kiehl said that he had managed to recruit a hundred and fifty volunteers. Using the youth version of the PCL, he identified more than fifty over-thirties among the kids.

Although psychologists don't call minors "psychopaths"—they are "youths with psychopathic traits"—there is considerable evidence that the condition manifests itself at ages earlier than eighteen; in a much cited 2005 paper, "Evidence for Substantial Genetic Risk for Psychopathy in Seven-Year-Olds," published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Essi Viding suggests that the condition can be detected in early childhood. Fledgling psychopaths are particularly interesting to researchers, because their brains are thought to be more malleable than those of adults. In a landmark 2006 study of a specialized talk-therapy treatment program, conducted at a juvenile detention center in Wisconsin, involving a hundred and forty-one young offenders who scored high on the youth version of the checklist, Michael Caldwell, a psychologist at the treatment center and a lecturer at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, reported that the youths that were treated were much more likely to stay out of trouble, once they were paroled, than the ones in the control group. "In other words," Kiehl told me, "psychopathy is treatable after all, if you can catch it young enough." Of course, as he pointed out in an e-mail, even with very violent young offenders we have to accept that "the only way to know if the treatment worked or not is to return the youths to the community once they have finished their sentence. . . . Perhaps you put them in a specialized community/monitoring program once they are released again."

To date, Kiehl has scanned ninety adult psychopathic brains with the portable scanner. The data, he says, confirm his hypothesis that psychopathy corresponds to a deficit in the paralimbic region. "If you put the pictures of the psychopaths' brains next to the control group, it's obvious," he told me. Joseph Newman, of the University of Wisconsin, while generally enthusiastic about Kiehl's hypothesis, hopes that he will use these new data to refine his model, which he still finds "quite vague as a theory."



"For passengers continuing on to New York, please insert another seventy-five cents."

• •

This fall, Kiehl plans to move the scanner to a women's prison near Grants. "No one has ever scanned female psychopaths, to my knowledge," Kiehl said. He can foresee many other neurobiological-research applications for the portable scanner, far beyond the field of psychopathy. "You could take it to Iraq, scan guys just before they go into battle, and then scan them when they come off the battlefield, and use that data to study post-traumatic stress syndrome," he suggested. Researchers into empathy and moral reasoning would also like to try Kiehl's scanner, but they have to be able to afford the five hundred dollars an hour it costs to run it. Recently, Jean Decety, a professor of social neuroscience at the University of Chicago, who is one of the world's leading empathy researchers, went to Western and used the scanner to study some of Kiehl's volunteers for a joint project.

While Kiehl and his colleagues are looking for a biological marker for psychopathy, molecular biologists have been analyzing DNA, in an attempt to identify a genetic marker. In a recently published study in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Guillermo Ponce and Janet Hoenicka report that two genes that have already been associated with severe alcoholism may also be linked to psychopathy. Efforts are also ongoing in other areas of neurobiological inquiry, including behavioral, neurochemical, pharmacological, and psychophysiological research.

If a biological basis for psychopathy could be established and pharmacological treatments developed, the idea that many people have at least a little of the psychopath in them could well become accepted. As Kiehl points out, "It used to be the case that it was very hard to meet clinical criteria for depression in the fifties and sixties. However, the definition of depression has been broadened so much with *DSM-IV* that nearly every person will meet the criteria at some point in their lives. One reason for this is that drug companies have lobbied to change the criteria—because they have a treatment, a drug, that can help people even with moderate levels of depression. It's a completely different issue whether this is appropriate." He added that "even moderate levels of psychopathy may someday be considered a disorder—especially if we can treat it."

Like many in the field of psychopathy research, Kiehl is aware of the enormous social implications of accepting psychopathy as a form of mental illness. What, for example, would you do with the young psychopaths who don't respond to treatment? The stigma would be profound. It's not hard to imagine a day when everyone's personal psychopathy risk will be assigned early in life—a kind of criminal-potential index. Kiehl was recently appointed as a scientific member of the MacArthur Foundation's Law and Neuroscience Project, which will study some of the legal implications of neuroimaging.

Psychopathy also raises fundamental issues about justice. At the core of our judicial system is the assumption that someone who appears sane is culpable for his actions. (In the U.S., there is no insanity defense for psychopaths.) As Decety, of the University of Chicago, put it to me, "We still basically work out of a Biblical system of punishment—we don't consider, in most cases, to what extent the offender's actions were intentional or unintentional. But what neuroscience is showing us is that a great many crimes are committed out of compulsion—the offenders couldn't help it. Once that is clear, and science proves it, what will the justice system do?" Joseph Newman told me, "I go around and give speeches to the staff in prisons, saying the inmates are not just assholes, and afterwards the guards come up and say, 'Enjoyed your talk, Doc, but are you saying these guys aren't responsible for their crimes?' "

Over the next ten years, Kiehl hopes to amass a database of ten thousand psychopaths—men, women, and juveniles, from a broad array of ethnic groups—complete with brain scans, DNA, and case histories. This database would serve psychopathy researchers in something of the same way that Dr. Johnson's dictionary served linguists—as a founding reference. Whether the data will guarantee the acceptance of psychopathy as a mental disorder is another matter. Hare said, "You're still going to have to collect a massive amount of biographical data from the subjects and link it all to the brain scans in order for them to make sense." And even then we probably won't know what makes people act without conscience.

Still, for Kiehl the portable fMRI is like a sports fantasy come true. "Sometimes I wake up in the morning and I just can't believe that it's all come together," he said. "The scanner, the lab, and the data we are amassing. It feels like winning the Super Bowl." ♦

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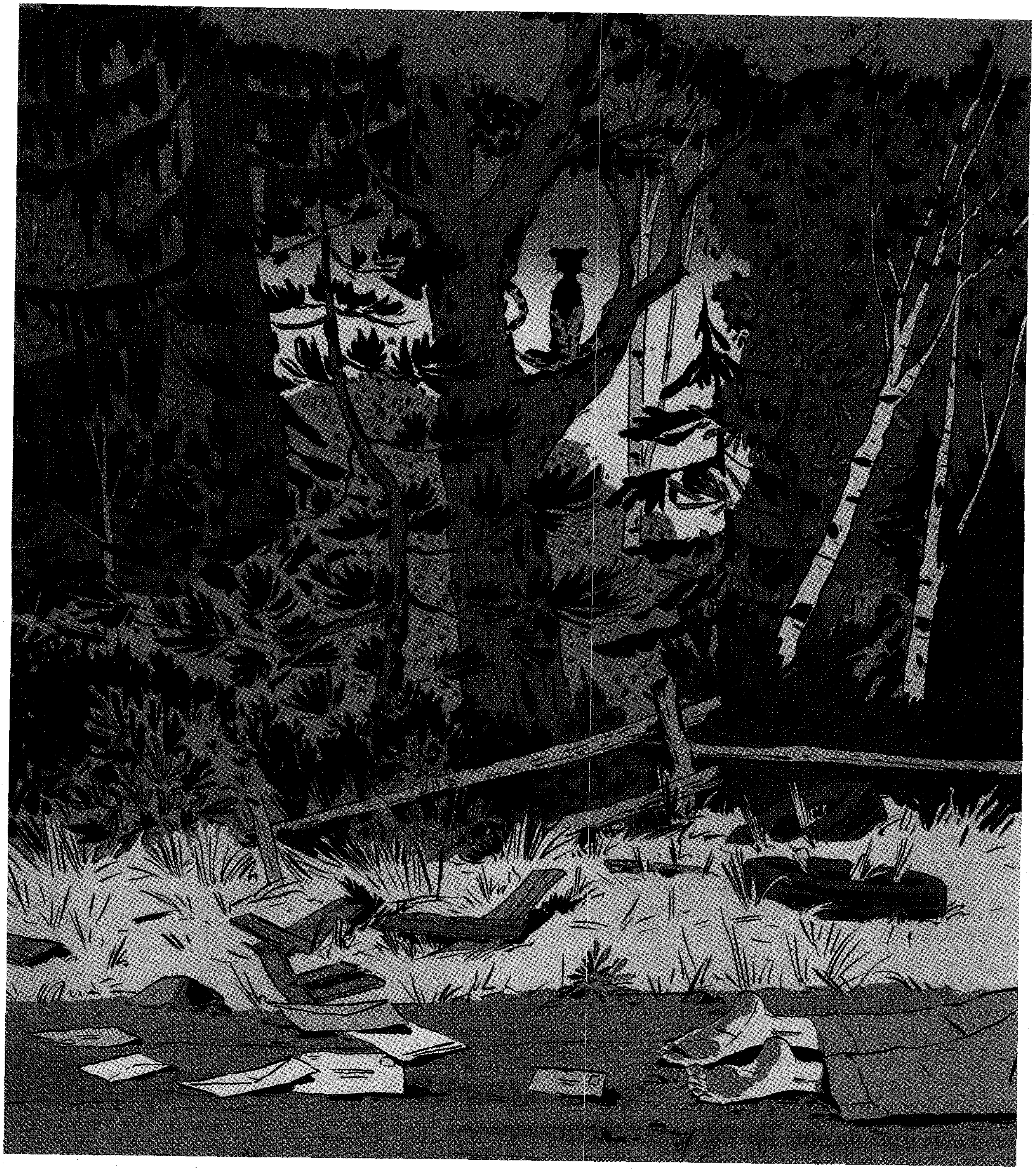
John Seabrook takes readers' questions.

FICTION

LEOPARD

BY WELLS TOWER



Good morning.

You have not slept well. Don't open your eyes. Stick out your tongue. Search for the little sore above your upper lip. Pray that it healed in the night.

No luck. Still there, rough to the tongue, and though it's very small, not even the diameter of a pencil eraser, it feels much larger. Your mother says it's a harmless fungal infection, and she pities you less for it than she should.

A tiny hamburger is what the fungus resembles, cracked and brown and perfectly centered in the little fluted area between your septum and upper lip. Yesterday, in the cafeteria, Josh Mohorn pointed out the similarity before a table of your friends. A painful thing, considering how much you would like to be Josh Mohorn. He turned to you and said, "Hey, Yancy, do me a favor."

"What's up?" you said, excited by the rare pleasure of Josh's attention.

"Could you take that seat down there?" he said, gesturing toward the far end of the table. "I can't eat my lunch with your fucking burger in my face."

Even you had to admire the succinct poetry of the line, which launched an instant craze of everyone jeering and calling you Burger King, or Patty, or All Beef, the name that stuck for the rest of the day and that will surely greet you this morning at school. You are eleven years old, the age that our essences begin revealing themselves, irremediably, to us and to the world. Just as Josh Mohorn is irremediably a soccer ace and a clothes ace, with feathered hair and white bucks, you are irremediably a fungus man.

Don't go to school today. Play sick.

Your mother comes in to wake you. Around the house, she wears paint-spattered jeans and old T-shirts, through whose slack sleeves you often catch sight of her underarm hair. But this morning she is dressed for work in a blue sateen blouse and tight white slacks, clothes that speak of a secret life. "I don't feel good," you tell your mother.

"Where? In your stomach?"

"Yeah," you say.

"Oh, God," she says. "I hope it's not that thing that's been going around."

"I don't know what it is," you say, panting shallowly. "It just really hurts."

She puts her hand on your forehead and holds it there. Her palm is dry and cool. You have always admired her hands—long, thin fingers and clean, ridged nails that never need polish. On her right index-finger knuckle is a perfect red dot, like a stamp of quality from the manufacturer. She slips her fingers down to your chest. Your skin is slick with sweat. You slept in your school clothes, jeans and a windbreaker, as you always do, amid the rustling mess of books and magazines piled in drifts on your bed. You will be twelve next year, but you usually still enjoy the solid, imperturbable sleep of a small child. You could get eight hours of good rest in a crate.

Your mother's fingers graze your sternum, and this makes you uncomfortable. A spray of large and painful pimples recently sprouted there. They throb with humiliated awareness when your mother touches them. This area of your body is a source of worry, in part because, years ago, a babysitter told you that all boys in their teen-age years develop a soft spot in their chests, like a baby's fontanel, and that you could kill somebody by punching him in that place. The babysitter was quite a liar, you realize now, even worse than you. He told you that in Florida there lived a race of murderous clowns who carried kitchen knives and who would come after you if you committed a sin. He also said that doctors performed abortions by delivering the baby and then putting it in a bucket and letting it cry to death. Still, you are not sure whether the babysitter was lying about the soft spot. The idea of it intrigues you. You writhe away from your mother's hand.

"What, you want to stay home?"

Swallow again. Close your eyes. "I don't know. I guess."

"O.K."

She kisses you and stands, ducking her head so as not to bash it on the top bunk, which is heaped with old blankets and boxes of your mother's stuff. She is right to be careful. Not long ago, you hit your head on it so forcefully that a hard white light went on behind your eyes. In your fury, you attacked the bed with your survival knife, inflicting minor, unsatisfying wounds. The little chips and gouges in the frame are a dispiriting reminder of the pointless assault.

On the shelf behind your head sits the tape deck your father bought you for your tenth birthday. You have stacks of cassettes full of your favorite songs, recorded off the radio, so all of them start a few seconds in, but you don't mind. You'd like to listen to your tapes, but you can hear your stepfather moving around in the kitchen. He is raising a din of clanking pots and clumsy feet, so loud you figure he must be doing it on purpose. You don't touch the tape deck, because you don't want him to know you're awake.

He and your mother live on twenty acres in thick woods. Your stepfather fancies himself a kind of socialist frontiersman, and he doesn't have a normal job. He is too busy tending the three large gardens on the property, and splitting logs for the wood-burning furnace he persuaded your mother to buy. He values hard work above everything, and every time you turn around your stepfather is there, putting a broom in your hand, or giving you a load of wet laundry to hang up, or telling you to fetch firewood, or scrub the sink, or dig a hole. "I have a job for you" is your stepfather's catchphrase, and you sometimes imitate it to make your mother laugh.

You rub your thumb along the soft white flesh of your forearm, which is still discolored from a job you had to do last summer. Your stepfather made you clear about an acre of honeysuckle, scrub, and vine where he wanted to put a shed. Halfway through, when he and your mother were away, you doused the jungle with paint stripper and set it on fire. You were careful to keep the hose handy, and the blaze didn't get out of control. You knocked out three days of work in one hour of fire. But the smoke covered you, and two days later you had poison ivy in a monstrous way. Blisters popped out on your hands, neck, and eyelids. Then they broke and crusted over into a multitude of little brown jewels. The doctor said it could have killed you if you had breathed the smoke. When you heard that, you were sorry you hadn't taken a lungful or two—not enough to do you in, but you liked the idea of having to spend some time in an oxygen tent because of a job your stepfather made you do.

If you say no to your stepfather, this is known as "lip." "I'm sick of your lip," he says, or "I've had it with your fucking lip." He is a thin, delicate man with

ZOHAR LAZAR

wire-frame glasses, but neither his slightness nor his way of talking like a corny Hollywood thug makes you any less afraid of him. He has slapped you a few times. Not long ago, your father stopped by to pick you up, and your stepfather argued with him. He pushed your father down, and then he picked up a stone the size of a football and made like he was going to throw it at your father's head. But he just tossed it away and laughed. For years to come, whenever you think of your father, the image of him cowering on the lawn, his hands clutching his skull in forlorn defense against the crushing stone, will be part of the picture. You are counting the days until you turn sixteen, which you've arbitrarily chosen as the age at which you'll be able to take your stepfather in a fight.

At twelve-thirty, you hear the front door creak and slap, and then the hornetish whine of your stepfather's leaf grinder starting up. He is making mulch again, a substance he seems to prize over food or money. Now it is safe to get out of bed. You go into the kitchen and pour yourself a large bowl of cornflakes. Take it into your mother and stepdad's bedroom, which contains the only television in the house. You are delighted to find "I Dream of Jeannie" on one of the U channels. Jeannie is miffed because, as an engagement present, Major Nelson's friends have crammed the house with the art work of a terrible genius, sculptures that gurgle with digestion sounds. Barbara Eden's belly excites you enormously. You grope into your underwear. Almost immediately, you hear the leaf grinder power down. You turn off the TV, run into the kitchen, and arrange yourself at the table. Your stepfather comes in, trailing a rich vegetable aroma. Bits of leaf and bark cling to his glistening arms and chest. "Feeling better?" he asks.

"Not really," you say.

He claps a rough hand to your forehead. His hand smells deliciously of gasoline. "You don't feel hot to me."

"It's my stomach that hurts."

"You puke?"

"No," you admit.

"You must be feeling better or you wouldn't be having that milk. If you're ready for milk, you must be getting better."

You don't see what milk has to do with anything, but you don't want to argue with him.

"I've got a headache," you say. "I thought I should eat something is all."

He sneers suspiciously and snorts through his nose. As a young liar, you can generally get pretty far on the assumption that adults have more important things to worry about than catching out a kid for every little fraud he tries to pull. But your stepfather seems to have plenty of time to study and doubt everything that comes out of your mouth. He will spend days gathering evidence to prove that those are your teeth marks on a pen you said you hadn't chewed. Your hatred of your stepfather is all-consuming and unceasing, but this is only because your world is still small, and your stepfather assumes an outsized significance in the story of your life. That your stepfather seems to dislike you with an energy and a relentlessness to match your own seems proof that your mother is married to a petty and dangerous child.

"You should get some fresh air," your stepfather says. "How about you go get the mail?"

This is not fair. The driveway is a half mile of rutted gravel that takes fifteen minutes to walk, and, as far as your stepfather knows, you're sick.

"Why? Mom'll get it when she comes back for lunch."

"You go get it," your stepfather says. "The air'll be good for you."

"Actually, I'm still a little dizzy."

"I'll bet a hot-fudge sundae you survive."

You set off across the lawn in bare feet. The earth under your toes is plush with mole tunnels. It is a hot autumn day. The clarity of the sky makes the trees look like television props with a blue screen behind them. You've already lost your summer calluses, and the driveway gravel is sharp, causing you to walk with a jouncing, high-elbowed gait, like a bird trying to take flight. You blame your stepfather for the unpleasantness of the gravel, and every few feet you pick up a handful and fling it into the woods, hoping that those handfuls will cost a lot of money to replace.

You pass the woodpiles and the chicken house. Past the stretch of woods where you once built a handsome lean-to encircling the bottom of an oak tree. It was a pretty good one, made of windfall limbs peeled smooth with a drawknife and thatched with pine straw. One day, a boy from the new neighborhood on the far side of the woods showed up, and you had words. The next day, you found the lean-to's ribs scattered across the clearing and your cache of untempting snacks—raw cashews, banana chips—emptied in the dirt. You mentioned the vandalism to your stepfather, and on a Sunday morning, when the boy and his family were at church, the two of you hiked through the woods and destroyed the expensive tree house on the boy's parents' property. Your stepfather tore off the roof tin and smashed the ladder with a crowbar. You broke the glass windows with stones, and you ached with the power of it—the two of you together in the same wild, righteous tribe.

You open the mailbox. It's crammed solid with magazines, bills, catalogues, and advertising circulars displaying red galleries of grocery-store beef, the sight of which makes the sore on your lip pulse. There must be fifteen pounds of mail, a sliding load that no sick person should have to carry. On the top of the heap, something catches your eye. It is a handmade flyer with a Xeroxed photograph of what appears to be a leopard. "Lost Pet," reads the flyer, with a phone number below. A breeze starts down your neck. You turn and look into the woods, though the leaves have not yet fallen and you can't see twenty feet. You turn back to the flyer. The leopard looks scrawny and unfearsome, but your heart beats a little harder knowing that it might be out there, moving in the dull pine wastes near your home, its spotted paws treading silently over the tree roots, the pine needles, and the leaf-covered troves of ancient beer cans and patent-medicine bottles. With the leopard out there, the woods seem famous now.

Far up the driveway, you can once again hear the whine of the leaf grinder starting up, a noise of startling crudeness and stupidity, an insult to the tickings and subtle movements of the living forest all around you. If this leopard is out here somewhere, it is surely offended by your stepfather's desecration of the

PRAYERS

1.
We pray
and the resurrection happens.

Here are the young
again,

sniping and giggling,

tingly
as ringing phones.

2.
All we ask
is that our thinking

sustain momentum,
identify targets.

The pressure
in my lower back
rising to be recognized
as pain.

The blue triangles
on the rug
repeating.

Coming up,
a discussion
on the uses
of torture.

The fear
that all *this*
will end.

The fear
that it won't.

—*Rae Armantrout*

silence. It would be no trouble for a leopard to sneak up behind him and carry him off, leaving no trace.

It is nearly one o'clock, the hour that your mother comes home for lunch. You do not want to be alone in the house with your stepfather. It still angers you that he has sent you down the driveway on your sick day, your special day of rest. You take a dozen steps, and then a plan suggests itself. Very carefully, you litter the mail in a haphazard fan on the driveway gravel so that it looks as though it were dumped there suddenly. You ease yourself down into a tire rut, splaying your arms and legs in the attitude of someone stricken by a fainting spell. When your mother's car swings into the drive, she will find you there. She may have to stand on the brakes to keep from running you over, but you are far enough up the driveway that you don't think she could hit you by mistake. She'll come to you crying and concerned. You'll let her coax it out of you, the story of how your stepfather made you get the mail.

Don't move. Don't mind the gravel digging into your cheek. Don't spoil the scene. She might not buy it anyway. Already, she halfway believes what your stepfather has been telling her about you: that you are a junior con man who can't open his mouth without a lie coming out.

An insect, probably a harmless black ant, troops up the back of your leg. Many minutes go by. As time passes, the giddy elation you felt at first, at the brilliance of your stratagem, begins eroding into shame. You decide you will wait until ten cars have rushed past on the blacktop road, and if your mother hasn't arrived by then you will get up and walk back to the house.

It is the sixth car that you hear brake suddenly, reverse, and then roll into the drive. It is not your mother's car. It is a car with a large, smoothly whirring engine. Maybe it's UPS or someone turning around. Be still.

A door opens, and your tongue thickens hotly with alarm. You keep your eyes shut tight. Shoes with hard soles crunch toward you on the gravel. Someone leans over you.

"Whoa, buddy—hey, hey." It is a man's voice, high and nervous. A hand nudges your shoulder. "Come on, now, pal."

The man draws halting breaths. It startles you when warm fingers find the side of your neck, searching for your pulse. Allow your eyes to open, taking care to flutter them as movie actors do when waking from a swoon. What first fills your vision is a shoe of gleaming black leather, possibly plastic, mounting to a gray trouser leg of synthetic fabric so clean and sharply creased it could have been cast in a mold. You glimpse the man's belt, where a large black pistol sits in a holster, and then up to the chrome badge on his clean gray shirt. He is young, his eyes bulging from a large, doughy face bracketed by blond sideburns that haven't filled in.

"Take it easy, now," he says. "Let's just take it easy."

If anyone needs to take it easy, it is not you but the policeman. His thick neck shifts in his collar, assessing the condition of your body with the edgy scrutiny of a rooster tracking a beetle. "You O.K.?" he asks. "You in pain? You bleeding anywhere?"

"I—I don't think so."

"You live up there?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine," you say. You sit up. The policeman puts his hand on your shoulder.

"Easy." He rubs his eye. "Jesus. You gave me a hell of a scare, buddy. I saw you and then that mail all scattered around. I thought, Oh, God damn. I thought maybe I had a drive-by shooting on my hands, or at least a hit-and-run. Look at this," he says, presenting his hip to show that he's undone the little holster snap that keeps his pistol in place. He seems too young and nervous to be trusted with a gun.

He asks how you're feeling and whether you've had fainting spells before.

"No, I'm fine," you tell him, getting up. "But thanks and everything." Begin gathering the mail. With any luck, he'll get back in his idling cruiser and leave. Your mother will be returning any minute. There isn't much time to jog up to the bend in the driveway, out of sight of the road, and reassemble the spectacle.

The policeman puts a thick hand on your arm. "Come on. Come on in the car and get cool."

With the policeman's help, you gather up the envelopes and catalogues. He ushers you into the passenger's side of the cruiser and slants each of the dashboard vents so that they are all blowing at you. He races the engine. The breeze pouring on you is sumptuously cold and laced with a faint smell of medicine, like the waiting room of a dentist's office. Nothing your mother owns smells bright and clean like this.

Jutting up from the dash is a shotgun in a metal brace. Scattered on the bench seat are other police tools—a big black flashlight, a notepad in a vaguely martial leather case. Somehow these things are more genuine and frightening than the shotgun, whose exact resemblance to what you've seen in movies makes it seem unreal.

"You feeling O.K.?" he asks again. "Not dizzy or nothing?"

"No," you say. "I'm fine now. Totally."

"What's this thing here?" he asks, pointing at his lip to indicate the hamburger.

"I had that before. It's just a fungus."

The policeman looks at you for a moment. His nostrils hoist in distaste. Then he unhitches his radio. "Two-oh-five, two-oh-five," he says. "You can kill that call to Rogers Road. It's just a kid who got a little dizzy and passed out. It's copacetic now," he says, winking at you, though you are not sure why. It occurs to you that you despise him a little for being so easily fooled.

The policeman goes on talking to you. "Tell you one thing," he says. "I won't need my coffee break this afternoon. After seeing you lying there like that, I'll be keyed up all day. I mean, damn, I was sure we had another dead kid on our hands."

Your ears prick up at that word: "another." Last spring, Samantha Mealey, a nine-year-old girl from your elementary school, was found naked in a maple tree on the public golf course, a length of clothesline around her neck. In fact, you'd met her at the bus stop just a few weeks before she died. She'd been a brassy, fearless little girl with a raucous laugh. On that afternoon, much to the chagrin of her older brother, she'd been trying to pull some boy's pants down and cussing out loud for fun. She was an exciting girl.

You have not had your first kiss, but you are already worried about sex. Just two grades ahead of you, kids are having it already. When you learned that the man who killed Samantha Mealey had raped her before he tied the noose around her neck, what occurred to you was this: At least she didn't die a virgin—a thought you cannot share with even your wickedest friends.

You feel a manic impulse to start talking, to keep yourself from being alone with thoughts of Samantha Mealey's murder. You show the leopard flyer to the policeman. "Have you heard about this?" you say. "There's a leopard running around out there."

He accepts the sheet and looks it over.

"Somebody had it for a pet," you say.

"See, I do not know who would have this thing at their residence, but I'll tell you one thing for sure: they're probably a dangerous element."

"Drug lords," you say.

"Could be bikers, maybe," the policeman says. "I swear, this whole area's changing. You just don't know anymore. Used to be this was a nice little town. Now it's turning into one of these places where anything can happen."

He passes the flyer back to you. You reach for the door. "So, thanks," you tell the policeman. "I should probably get going. My dad's probably wondering where I am." You pull the door handle. It's locked.

"Oh, you ain't walking anywhere, buddy," he tells you with a stern fondness that makes you uneasy. "I'll drive you. You keel over again and knock your head, I'm in real trouble."

He puts the cruiser into drive, and the car rolls forward. Untrimmed thorns and sapling limbs clutch at the car with intermittent shrieks that embarrass you.

"Thanks," you tell the policeman once the house comes into view. "Thanks for the lift and everything."

He turns in the direction of the leaf grinder, where your stepfather stands with his back turned. "That your dad?" he asks. "Probably ought to talk to him." You don't want him to, but there is nothing you can do.

Together, you and the policeman walk across the lawn to your stepfather. The lawn is choked with a special weed that explodes seeds when you touch it. Little clouds detonate around the policeman's shiny shoes and land in his trouser cuffs. Your stepfather keeps feeding leaves into his grinder until the policeman is about three feet away. Then he turns. He narrows his eyes at the policeman, and then at you. The sweat is pouring off him, curling the hair on his bare chest into dozens of dark whorls. He turns the grinder off, looking hostile and put out.

"Who are you?" he asks.

"Officer Behrends, sir. I was driving past and I found your son lying in the driveway. He gave me a real scare."

"Hmm." Your stepfather turns to you. The muscles around his eyes are tense. "What were you doing lying in the driveway?"

"I don't know," you say. "I just got dizzy and then I woke up. I guess I passed out."

"That mail was all scattered around,

and he was lying on his face," the policeman says. "I didn't know what had happened to him. He gave me a scare. I was thinking maybe he'd been shot."

"Maybe you sat down and then you fell asleep," your stepfather says after a moment. "That's probably what happened."

"I didn't sit down," you say. It is just like him to question your story, even with an officer of the law beside you, corroborating it. "I fell."

Your stepfather walks toward you. He takes your chin in his thumb and forefinger, and turns your face back and forth, as though it were a piece of merchandise he was thinking about buying.

"You must have fallen pretty easy," he says. "When you faint, you go down hard. You don't have any cuts."

"I don't know how I fell," you say. "I wasn't there watching."

"All right. Go inside now," your stepfather says.

But you don't move. You don't want to. The sun slips behind a cloud. Something—you don't know what—is about to happen. You feel it, and you stand there, holding the mail, scraping the sharp edge of a magazine against your chin, out of which a single precious hair has lately dared to curl.

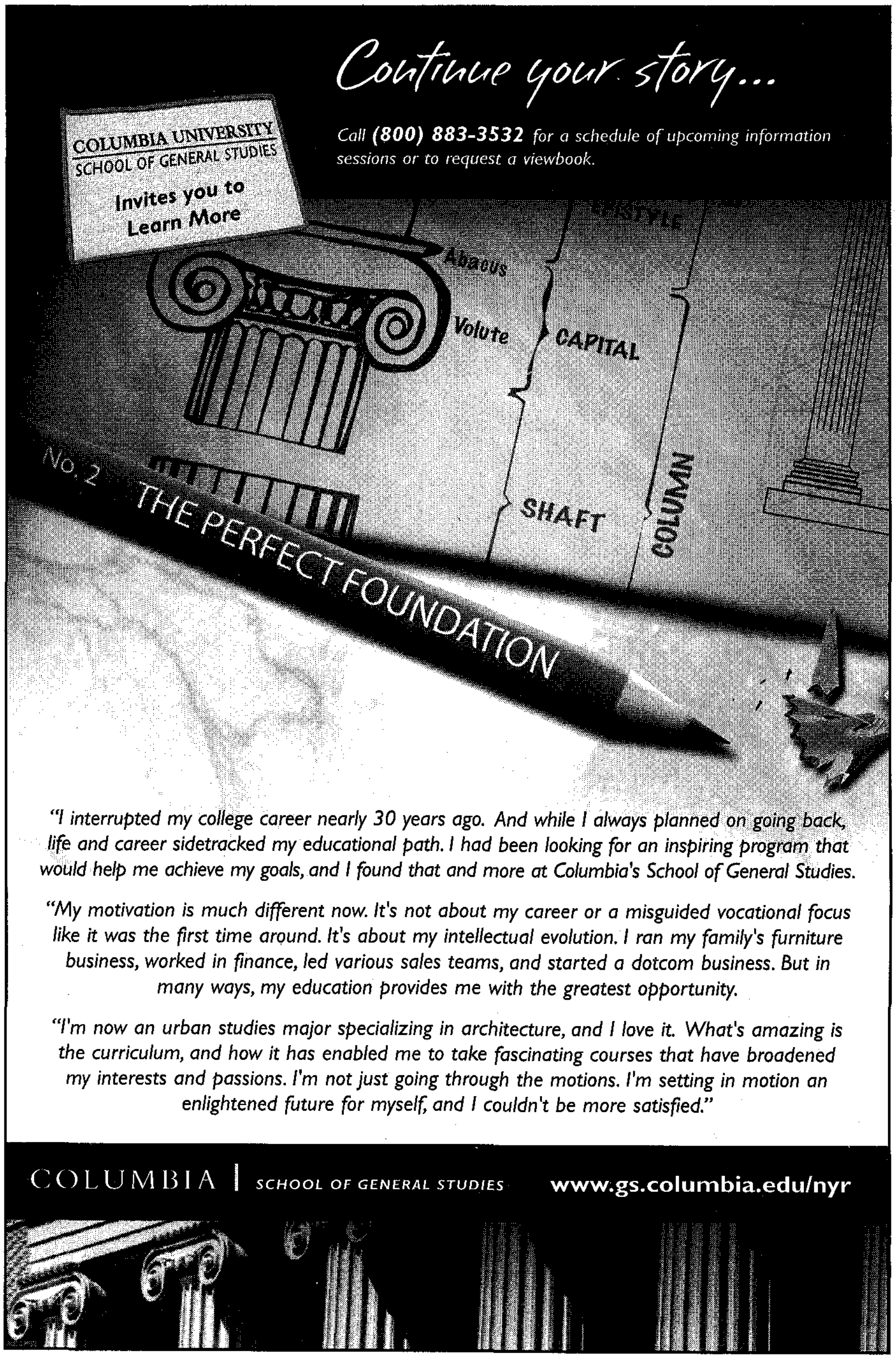
"Hell of a lucky thing that I saw him when I did," the policeman says. He seems to be angling for a handshake or words of gratitude from your stepfather, and you pity him for that. "Who knows? Somebody could have pulled in quick and run him over. It's a lucky thing."

"Yeah, pretty lucky," your stepfather says. Then he turns to you. "Go on inside. Wait for your mother."

But you stay where you are. Then, off in the trees behind the clothesline, you hear a branch snap and the sound of something big tussling in the wooded shade. Your breathing goes quick and shallow. You close your eyes. Picture it, the leopard, its shoulders rising and falling as it lopes across the lawn.

"Hey," your stepfather says, lightly slapping your cheek. "What's the matter with you? Blacking out again?"

Don't answer. Listen. Be still. ♦



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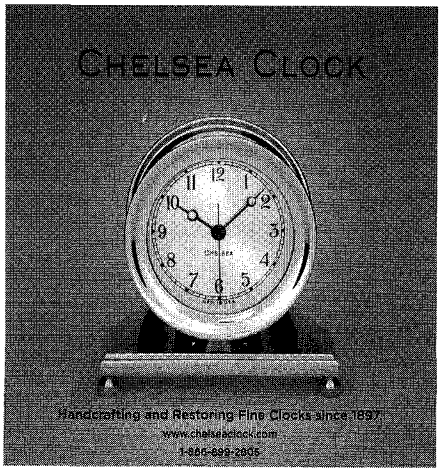

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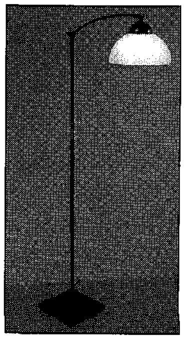

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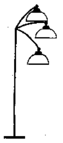

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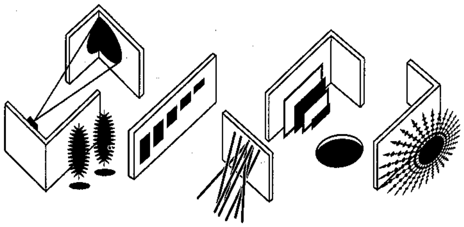


A CRITIC AT LARGE

MELTING INTO AIR

Before the financial system went bust, it went postmodern.

BY JOHN LANCHESTER

For most adults, the sensation of being proved right is usually a complex and bittersweet one. You might have said that your brother-in-law would turn out to be a no-goodnik, or that the forty-third President would turn out to be the worst in American history, and you may regard subsequent events as inarguable proof that you were right—but it's not an especially happy feeling. It changes nothing about the world outside your head. You were right. Congratulations. And?

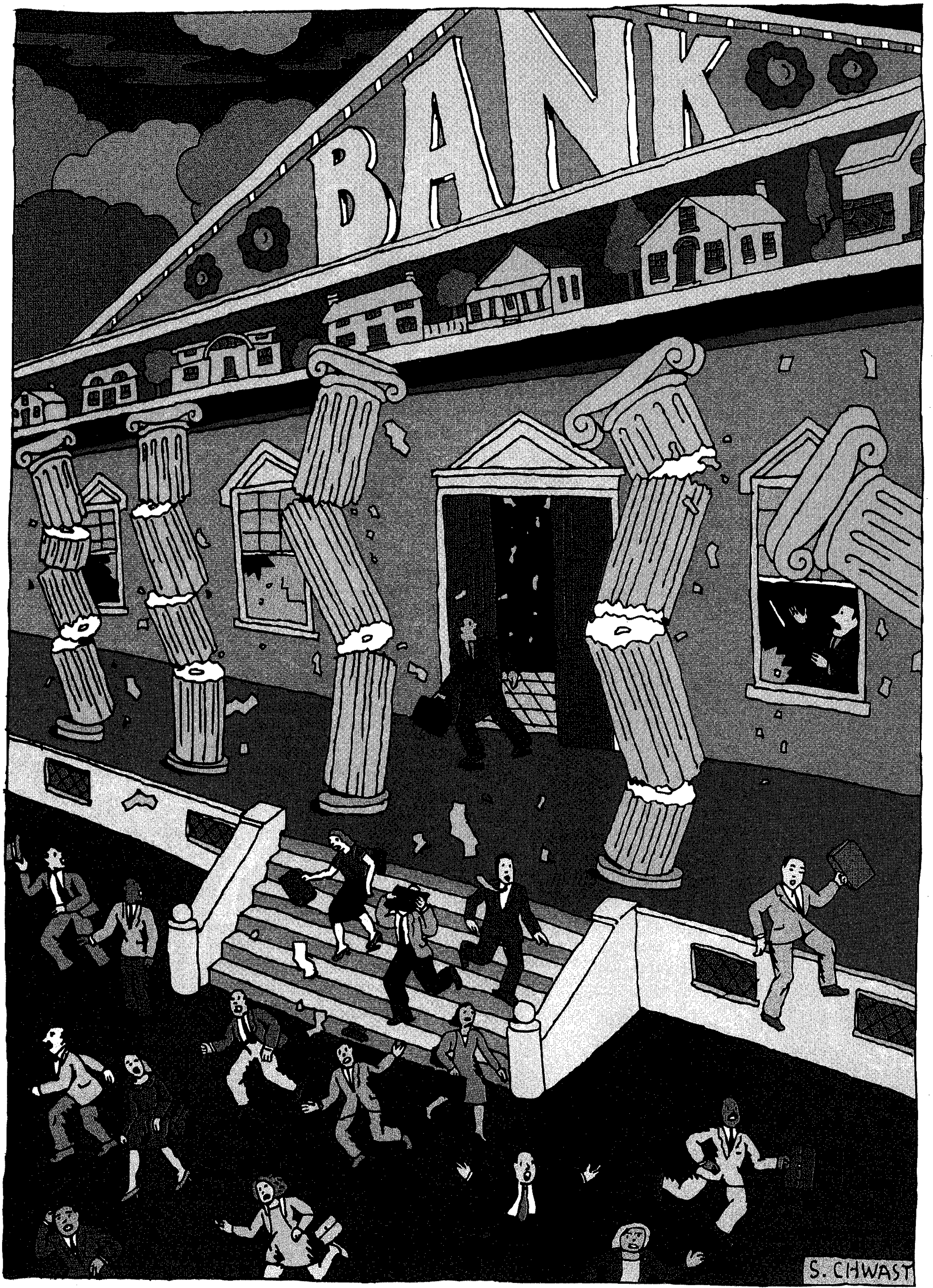
One of the peculiar things about the world of finance is that it freely offers the sensation of being proved right to its participants. Every transaction in the markets has a buyer and a seller, and, in most cases, one of them is right and the other wrong, because the price goes either up or down. The cumulative weight of this right-or-wrongness is one of the things that make financial types psychologically distinctive. Artists, sportsmen, surgeons, plumbers, and the rest of us have secret voices of doubt, inner reservations about ourselves, but if you go to work with money, and make money, you can be proved right in the most inhumanly pure way. This is why people who have succeeded in the world of money tend to have such a high opinion of themselves. And this is why they seem to regard themselves as paragons of rationality, while others often regard them as slightly nuts. The chairman and C.E.O. of Lehman Brothers, Richard Fuld, in his no-apologies testimony to a congressional committee after his company's collapse, gave us a glimpse of this state of mind in its full pomp.

This is also why the financial masters of the universe tend not to write books. If you have been proved—*proved*—right, why bother? If you need to tell it, you can't truly know it. The story of David Einhorn and Allied Capital is an example of a moneyman who believed, with absolute certainty, that he was in the right, who said so, and who then watched the world fail to react to his irrefutable demonstration of his own rightness. This drove him so crazy that he did what was, for a hedge-fund manager, a bizarre thing: he wrote a book about it.

The story began on May 15, 2002, when Einhorn, who runs a hedge fund called Greenlight Capital, made a speech for a children's-cancer charity in Hackensack, New Jersey. The charity holds an annual fund-raiser at which investment luminaries give advice on specific shares. Einhorn was one of eleven speakers that day, but his speech had a twist: he recommended shorting—betting against—a firm called Allied Capital. Allied is a "business development company," which invests in companies in their early stages. Einhorn found things not to like in Allied's accounting practices—in particular, its way of assessing the value of its investments. The mark-to-market accounting that Einhorn favored is based on the price an asset would fetch if it were sold today, but many of Allied's investments were in small startups that had, in effect, no market to which they could be marked. In Einhorn's view, Allied's way of pricing its holdings amounted to "the you-have-got-to-be-kidding-me method of accounting." At the same time, Allied was issuing new equity, and, according to Einhorn, the revenue from this could be used to fund the dividend payments that were keeping Allied's investors happy. To Einhorn, this looked like a potential Ponzi scheme.

The next day, Allied's stock dipped more than twenty per cent, and a storm of controversy and counter-accusations began to rage. "Those engaging in the current misinformation campaign against Allied Capital are cynically trying to take advantage of the current post-Enron environment by tarring a great and honest company like Allied Capital with the broad brush of a Big Lie," Allied's C.E.O. said. Einhorn would be the first to admit that he wanted Allied's stock to drop, which might make his motives seem impure to the general reader, but not to him. The function of hedge funds is, by his account, to expose faulty companies and make money in the process. Joseph Schumpeter described capitalism as "creative destruction": hedge funds are destructive agents, predators targeting the weak and infirm. As Einhorn might see it, people like him are especially necessary because so many others have been asleep at the wheel. His book about his five-year battle with Allied, "Fooling Some of the People All of the Time" (Wiley; $29.95), depicts analysts, financial journalists, and the S.E.C. as being culpably complacent. The S.E.C. spent three years investigating Allied. It found that Allied violated accounting guidelines, but noted that the company had since made improvements. There were no penalties. Einhorn calls the S.E.C. judgment "the lightest of taps on the wrist with the softest of feathers." He deeply minds this, not least because the complacency of the watchdogs prevents him from being proved right on a reasonable schedule: if they had seen things his way, Allied's stock price would have promptly collapsed and his short selling would be hugely profitable. As it was, Greenlight shorted Allied at $26.25, only to spend the next years watching the stock drift sideways and

ABOVE: PIERRE DI SCIULLO; OPPOSITE: SEYMOUR CHWAST



The fragility of the banks was easily disguised: "value," in the financial markets, was as elusive as "meaning" in deconstruction.

upward; eventually, in January of 2007, it hit thirty-three dollars.

All this has a great deal of resonance now, because, on May 21st of this year, at the same charity event, Einhorn announced that Greenlight had shorted another stock, on the ground of the company's exposure to financial derivatives based on dangerous subprime loans. The company was Lehman Brothers. There was little delay in Einhorn's being proved right about that one: the toppling company shook the entire financial system. A global cascade of bank implosions ensued—Wachovia, Washington Mutual, and the Icelandic banking system being merely some of the highlights to date—and a global bailout of the entire system had to be put in train. The short sellers were proved right, and also came to be seen as culprits; so was mark-to-market accounting, since it caused sudden, cataclysmic drops in the book value of companies whose holdings had become illiquid. It is therefore the perfect moment for a short-selling advocate of marking to market to publish his account. One can only speculate whether Einhorn would have written his book if he had known what was going to happen next. (One of the things that have happened is that, on September 30th, Ciena Capital, an Allied portfolio company to whose fraudulent lending Einhorn dedicates many pages, went into bankruptcy; this coincided with a collapse in the value of Allied stock—finally!—to a price of around six dollars a share.) Given the esteem with which Einhorn's profession is regarded these days, it's a little as if the assassin of Archduke Franz Ferdinand had taken the outbreak of the First World War as the timely moment to publish a book advocating bomb-throwing—and the book had turned out to be unexpectedly persuasive.

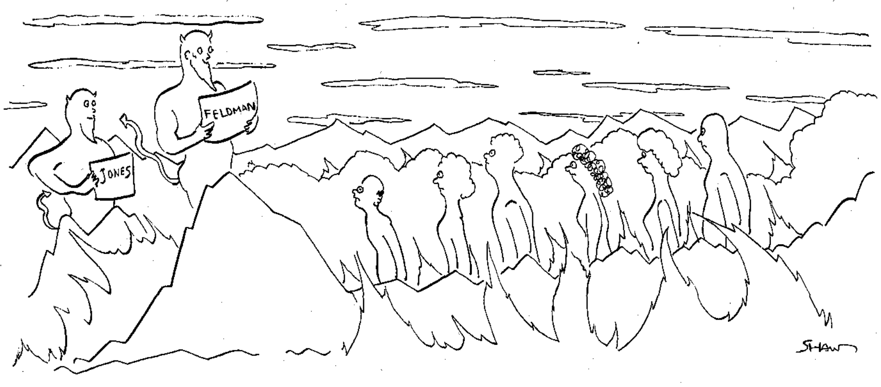
The well-disguised fact about Einhorn, though, is that he is rather old-fashioned. His hedge fund, Greenlight, is a long-short value fund. It bets directly on companies (that is the "long," and larger, part of the fund) or against them (that's the "short" side). This is, in the world of high finance, not at all the new new thing. Indeed, the very fact that Einhorn is able to explain in plain English what his fund does is a sign that he isn't at the cutting edge of finance. Another man who shuns that bleeding edge is Warren Buffett, who also happens to be quantifiably the greatest investor alive.

Buffett is unique in many respects, and one of them is his eagerness to explain how and why he does what he does. His advice sounds so plain and so reasonable—"Put your eggs in one basket, and then watch the basket"—that the reader thinks it can't possibly be that simple. Underlying the desire to explain what he's up to is the wish to be proved right, since Buffett regards himself as living proof that the "efficient market" theory of market pricing is wrong. The theory holds that markets, given perfect information, will always set an accurate price for a stock, one that takes full account of all the relevant probabilities and variables. Buffett thinks his own success shows that it's possible to use generally available information to consistently outperform the market. This sounds so commonsensical that it's hard to explain just how at odds this is with the way people have been trained to think about stock markets. Common sense is one of the hallmarks of Buffett's writings on finance—which are, very Buffettishly, to be found pretty much nowhere other than in his annual letters to shareholders of his company, Berkshire Hathaway. Here is Buffett on the junk-bond boom, from 1989:

> In effect, a Scarlett O'Hara "I'll think about it tomorrow" position in respect to principal payments was taken by borrowers and accepted by a new breed of lender, the buyer of original-issue junk bonds. Debt now became something to be refinanced rather than repaid. The change brings to mind a *New Yorker* cartoon in which the grateful borrower rises to shake the hand of the bank's lending officer and gushes: "I don't know how I'll ever repay you."

There's something almost nineteenth century about Buffett's writing on finance—calm, sane, and literate. It's not a tone you'll readily find in anyone else's company reports, letters to shareholders, public filings, or press releases. That's because finance, like other forms of human behavior, underwent a change in the twentieth century, a shift equivalent to the emergence of modernism in the arts—a break with common sense, a turn toward self-referentiality and abstraction and notions that couldn't be explained in workaday English. In poetry, this moment took place with the publication of "The Waste Land." In classical music, it was, perhaps, the première of "The Rite of Spring." Jazz, dance, architecture, painting—all had comparable moments. The moment in finance came in 1973, with the publication of a paper in the *Journal of Political Economy* titled "The Pricing of Options and Corporate Liabilities," by Fischer Black and Myron Scholes.

The revolutionary aspect of Black and Scholes's paper was an equation that enabled people to calculate the price of financial derivatives based on the value of the underlying asset. Derivatives themselves had been a long-standing feature of financial markets. At their simplest, a farmer would agree to a price for his next harvest a few months in advance—and the right to buy this harvest was a derivative, which could itself be sold. A similar arrangement could be made with equity shares, where what was traded was an option to buy or sell them at a given price on a given date. The trade in these derivatives was hampered, however, by the fact that—owing to the numerous variables of time and risk—no one knew how to price them. The Black-Scholes formula provided a way to do so. It was a defining moment in the mathematization of the market. The trade in derivatives took off, to the extent that the total market in de-



rivative products around the world is counted in the hundreds of trillions of dollars. Nobody knows the exact figure, but the notional amount certainly exceeds the total value of all the world's economic output, roughly sixty-six trillion dollars, by a huge factor—perhaps tenfold.

It seems wholly contrary to common sense that the market for products that derive from real things should be unimaginably vaster than the market for things themselves. With derivatives, we seem to enter a modernist world in which risk no longer means what it means in plain English, and in which there is a profound break between the language of finance and that of common sense. It is difficult for civilians to understand a derivatives contract, or any of a range of closely related instruments, such as credit-default swaps. These are all products that were designed initially to transfer or hedge risks—to purchase some insurance against the prospect of a price going down, when your main bet was that the price would go up. The farmer selling his next season's crop might not have understood a modern financial derivative, but he would have recognized that use of it. The trouble is that derivatives are so powerful that—human nature being what it is—people could not resist using them as a form of leveraged bet. Buffett dislikes derivatives. From 2002:

> The range of derivatives contracts is limited only by the imagination of man (or sometimes, so it seems, madmen). At Enron, for example, newsprint and broadband derivatives, due to be settled many years in the future, were put on the books. Or say you want to write a contract speculating on the number of twins to be born in Nebraska in 2020. No problem—at a price, you will easily find an obliging counterparty.

From 2003:

> No matter how financially sophisticated you are, you can't possibly learn from reading the disclosure documents of a derivatives-intensive company what risks lurk in its positions. Indeed, the more you know about derivatives, the less you will feel you can learn from the disclosures normally proffered you. In Darwin's words, "Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge."

Buffett was horribly right about the risks. A number of new books describe the link between derivatives, subprime mortgages, and the meltdown of '08, and they all have the claim on our attention of having been written before the full scale of the implosion became clear. In other words, their authors are people who said it was going to happen before it happened—who enjoy the ambivalent status of having been proved right. Charles R. Morris's "The Trillion Dollar Meltdown" (PublicAffairs; $22.95) was handed to the publisher last Thanksgiving, a fact that gives Morris, a former banker, rock-solid status as a predictor of the crash. He homes in on the complexity and the paradoxical unpredictability of these financial instruments, which were supposed to manage risk and ended up magnifying it.

The result is a new kind of crash. The broad rules of market bubbles and implosions are well known. They were systematized by the economist Hyman Minsky (a student of Schumpeter's), in the nineteen-sixties, and their best-known popular formulation is in Charles P. Kindleberger's classic work "Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises" (1978). Tulip bulbs in the sixteen-thirties, railways in the eighteen-forties, and Internet stocks in the nineteen-nineties are all examples of the boom-bust cycle of a mania leading to a crash. As Morris points out, however, a credit bubble is a different thing: "We are accustomed to thinking of bubbles and crashes in terms of specific markets—like junk bonds, commercial real estate, and tech stocks. Overpriced assets are like poison mushrooms. You eat them, you get sick, you learn to avoid them. A credit bubble is different. Credit is the air that financial markets breathe, and when the air is poisoned, there's no place to hide."

The crisis began with defaulting subprime mortgages, and spread throughout the international financial system. Thanks to the new world of derivatives and credit-default swaps, nobody really knows who is at risk from the wonderfully named "toxic debt" at the heart of the trouble. As a result, banks are reluctant to lend to each other, and, since the entire financial system depends on interbank liquidity, the entire financial system is at risk. It is for this reason that Warren Buffett was doubly right to compare the new financial products to "weapons of mass destruction"—first, because they are lethal, and, second, because no one knows how to track them down.

If the invention of derivatives was the financial world's modernist dawn, the current crisis is unsettlingly like the birth of postmodernism. For anyone who stud-

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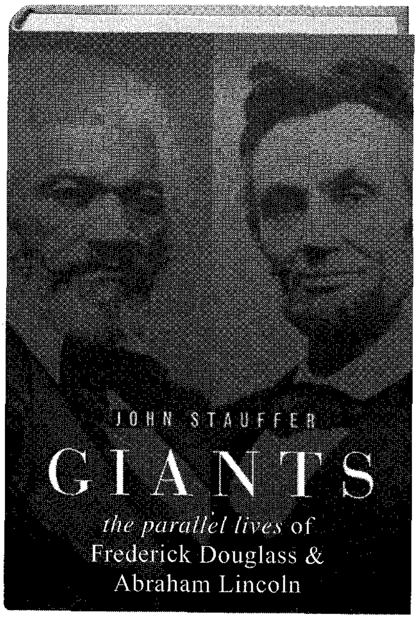
Harvard University, author of *America Behind the Color Line*



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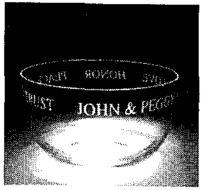

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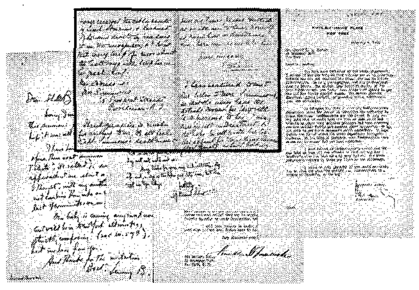

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ied literature in college in the past few decades, there is a weird familiarity about the current crisis: value, in the realm of finance capital, evokes the elusive nature of meaning in deconstructionism. According to Jacques Derrida, the doyen of the school, meaning can never be precisely located; instead, it is always “deferred,” moved elsewhere, located in other meanings, which refer and defer to other meanings—a snake permanently and necessarily eating its own tail. This process is fluid and constant, but at moments the perpetual process of deferral stalls and collapses in on itself. Derrida called this moment an “aporia,” from a Greek term meaning “impasse.” There is something both amusing and appalling about seeing his theories acted out in the world markets to such cataclysmic effect. Anyone invited to attend a meeting of the G-8 financial ministers would be well advised not to draw their attention to this.

The result of our era of financial deconstruction has been a decades-long free-for-all of deregulation and (for the most part) bull markets, ending in partial nationalization. It's like a surreal parody of what happened in the former Soviet Union, with decades of socialism ending in the overnight transition to a full market economy. The map of how we got here is laid out with painful clarity in Kevin Phillips's book “Bad Money” (Viking; $25.95), a powerful account of how the debt bubble, the housing bubble, weak regulation, and too-cheap credit helped to create the current mess. Phillips rightly calls the place we're in now a “global crisis of American capitalism.” Unfortunately, a clear view of the road taken doesn't offer much of a guide to action, once the immediate dangers have passed.

One man who does have some ideas is the Yale economist Robert Shiller, who would merit attention if only for the fact that he predicted the bursting of the Internet bubble, in 2000, with his book “Irrational Exuberance,” then discussed at length the dangers of systematic risk in his next, “The New Financial Order: Risk in the 21st Century.” Now, in “The Subprime Solution” (Princeton; $16.95)—published in August, after the start of the meltdown, but before the full scale of the disaster had become manifest—he comes up with a set of startlingly counterintuitive suggestions about what to do next.

Shiller's basic idea is that there should be more market activity. He has a number of suggestions for spreading the risk of homeownership: “continuous workout mortgages,” in which loan terms are adjusted monthly against economic conditions and the borrower's ability to pay; comprehensive financial advice targeted at the poor (an idea that nobody could argue with, and that nobody will want to pay for); a “financial product safety commission,” as proposed by the Harvard legal scholar Elizabeth Warren; improved disclosure on the part of financial institutions; and the expansion of housing-futures markets. These would mean that “any skeptic anywhere in the world could, through his or her actions in the marketplace, act to reduce a speculative bubble in a city.” Anyone who thought property prices in an area were too high could bet against them by selling them short—which would, the theory goes, exert a downward pressure on prices. This would help all of us, by reducing the bubble-and-bust cycle of property prices. We need every tool we can get to help reduce the risk of having all our capital tied up in a single heavily leveraged, highly illiquid asset—that is to say, our homes. Shiller approvingly quotes an argument that “the introduction of derivatives tends to improve the liquidity and informativeness of markets,” which, given what has just happened, might be the worst-timed assertion ever to have been made by a prominent economist. That doesn't mean he's wrong, though, and his book would have to be on the bedside table of whoever gets to design the systems that make a repetition of this particular crash less likely. (Shiller also points out that “bailout” has no entry in the twenty-volume Oxford English Dictionary.)

It seems loopy that the cure for a disaster caused by a headlong dash in the direction of ever freer capital markets should be even freer capital markets; but that is part of Shiller's point. When it comes to the free global movement of capital, there is no plan B. Are there any unreconstructed Marxists left, anywhere in the wild? (Universities don't count.) If there are, now would be a good moment for one of them to publish a book saying that the man in the beard would regard himself as having been proved right. ♦

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An audio interview with John Lanchester.

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Only Son, *by Stéphane Audeguy, translated from the French by John Cullen (Harcourt; $25).* The older brother of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who is mentioned only briefly—and dismissively—in the French philosopher's "Confessions," here embarks on an autobiography of his own, tracing his progress from a watchmaker's workshop in Geneva to a high-class bordello in Paris. He winds up making intricate sex toys, an activity that lands him in the Bastille, where he spends the next twenty-seven years in relative comfort, allowed to go out on walks (and patronize whorehouses) and to import marshmallows for his fellow-prisoner the Marquis de Sade. Full of arch asides—the hero notes that "the French are readier to pardon a murderer than a man who attacks the dignity of money"—the book strives to be both a critical gloss on the Revolution and a madcap romp, with more success, ultimately, at the latter.

Two Marriages, *by Phillip Lopate (Other; $24.95).* All marriages are a gamble: how well do you need to understand your partner before you jump in the game? In this pair of novellas, Lopate examines the question first with humor, and then with melancholy. In the opening one, a middle-aged academic with a private income marries the Filipino nurse's aide who cared for his dying mother. True, he knows almost nothing about her past, but does that really matter, if he is madly in love? In the second, a middle-aged couple, whose town house in Brooklyn is perpetually filled with good food, good wine, and good conversation, consider themselves well armed against the threats of their previous relationships, but do they know one another's secrets—and, for that matter, should they? Lopate brings considerable psychological insight to these questions but fails to make us feel the risks in our gut. We may be titillated by this high-stakes game, but we have no difficulty walking away from the table.

Nights in the Pink Motel, *by Robert Earle (Naval Institute; $34.95).* In this quirky, revealing memoir, Earle, a retired foreign-service officer and a fiction writer with a history of depression, is, with the approval of his wife but not of his psychiatrist, talked into going to Iraq by John Negroponte, the incoming U.S. Ambassador. Negroponte wants Earle to be his "thinker"—his actual title is senior adviser—but a lot of what he thinks about is why is he in Iraq, rather than, say, working on his novel. The grandness of his mission feels slightly absurd to Earle, and the entire American enterprise comes across as strangely, unhappily contingent. He writes an ambitious report for the President modelled on George Kennan's "Long Telegram," but he gets the sense from Negroponte that Bush was too annoyed by it to give it much of a look.

The Chicagoan, *by Neil Harris (Chicago; $65).* From 1926 to 1935, a group of Midwestern writers, editors, and artists published a magazine strikingly similar to this one. *The Chicagoan* ran profiles, reviews, and editorials, interspersed with cartoons, and presented breezy dispatches on local events in a section that no one seemed embarrassed to call "Talk of the Town." This volume, subtitled "A Lost Magazine of the Jazz Age," offers a sample of the contents, including one entire issue, and has an excellent introductory essay on the magazine's chaotic history. The publication's art work was strong, but its writing lacked the consistency of tone that might have lent the project coherence. Many authors seem to have been beset by second-city syndrome, and the most entertaining bits today are those in which they spoof their own anxieties about Chicago's rough-and-tumble reputation. In one cartoon, a pet-store owner tries to sell an older woman a parrot formerly owned by a local débutante. The customer's response? "But I already have a parrot that swears."

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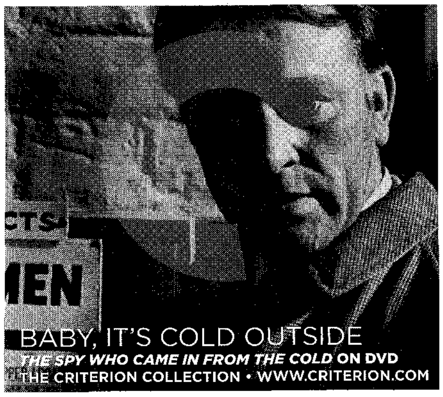
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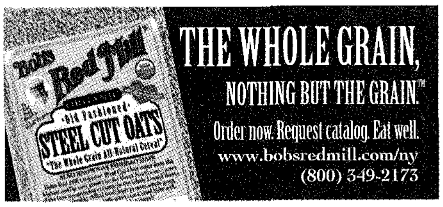
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POP MUSIC

PRODIGY

The rise of Taylor Swift.

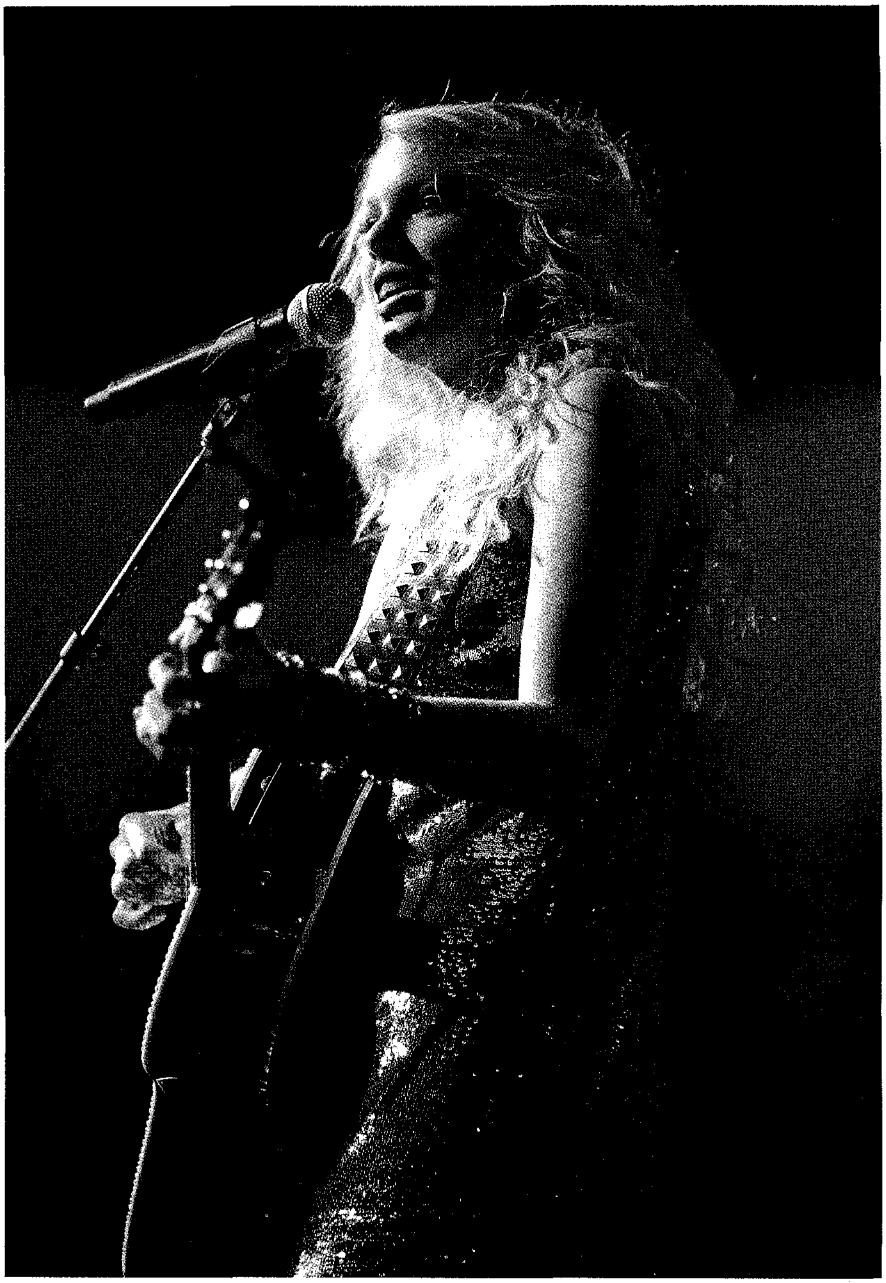
BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Taylor Swift, a slender, pale eighteen-year-old with curly blond hair that hangs in long tresses, is one of the biggest young stars in popular music. I recently caught her at an arena in St. Paul, where she opened for the country trio Rascal Flatts. Before the show, she chatted calmly with her mother, Andrea. "So the hockey team is the Wild or the Wilds?" Taylor asked a stagehand as she prepared her between-song patter. A few minutes later, the crowd cheered as she came onstage in a sleeveless, calf-length gold-sequinned dress, and the cheering continued throughout her performance. It became obvious that she and Rascal Flatts had equal claims on the room. Strutting across stage platforms, performing a percussion duet on garbage cans, and switching gears without pause—her voice, all the while, light and breathy and without affectation—she returned the crowd's energy with the professionalism she has shown since the age of fourteen, when she was signed as a songwriter to Sony/ATV Music Publishing, in Nashville.

The music industry's collapse may have seemed like a dress rehearsal for the current financial meltdown, but there are still stars in the business, and there is an interesting trend in both number and gender: the popular groups are male—Nickelback, Coldplay, the Eagles. The solo stars now, though, are more likely to be women: Alicia Keys, Carrie Underwood, Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Taylor Swift (who probably won't need that surname for long). Her self-titled début album, released when she was sixteen, has been on the charts for two years. It is triple platinum and still rests, impressively, at No. 31 on the Billboard 200. Swift wrote or co-wrote every song on the album, one when she was twelve. Her second album, "Fearless," will be released on November 11th, and has already delivered two singles to the upper reaches of the charts: "Fearless" is at No. 9 on the Billboard Hot 100, and "Love Story" is at No. 14. Short samples of both songs were available for streaming on Swift's MySpace page weeks before they hit radio, and that page has garnered more than ninety million plays. After her St. Paul show, she changed into sweatpants, curled up inside a silk comforter on her tour-bus couch, and checked her page for new comments from fans, which she answers herself. (She was soon distracted by her iPod Touch.)

One aspect of Swift's story is timeless, and could have happened during any decade in the last century. Her talent as a songwriter and singer was obvious enough to her parents that they moved their family from Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, to Hendersonville, Tennessee, when she was thirteen. Though prodigies are always surprising, the surprise is only in degree, not category; what is surprising about Swift is her indifference to category or genre. She is considered part of Nashville's country-pop tradition only because she writes narrative songs with melodic clarity and dramatic shape—Nashville's stock-in-trade. But such songs also crop up in R. & B. and rap and rock. It is evidence of her ear that she not only identifies with songs in other genres but performs them, even though Nashville is a musically conservative place. It is only superficially jarring that Swift, the "country" artist, has covered Eminem's "Lose Yourself" and Beyoncé's "Irreplaceable" in concert. Both are fat-free, unerring pieces of songwriting. Swift is not an agent of revolution; she, much like Beyoncé, is a preternaturally skilled student of established values. Her precociousness isn't about her chart success, but lies in the quality of her work, how fully she's absorbed the lessons of her elders and how little she seems to care which radio format will eventually claim her. Change the beat and the instruments around the voice, and her songs could work anywhere.

You could also give a Swift composi-



Beyond genre: Swift, the "country" artist, has covered Eminem and Beyoncé in concert.

BRIAN HINELINE/RETNA

tion like "Our Song" to someone twenty years older and it could work just fine. The concerns of kids aren't necessarily juvenile—just their reactions. Bridging this gap is the trick of pop music; when people sing "Love Me Do" to themselves on their way to a date ten years on the other side of their second divorce, it's a sign that a young songwriter has got to a universal truth. This kind of precocious wisdom is embedded in the work of songwriters like Hank Williams, Prince, Elvis Costello, and Randy Newman. People who aren't old enough to have lived the songs they've written nevertheless know how the song embodying that life should go.

"Our Song" was not Swift's first hit, but it was the first to stop me in my tracks. It's a breezy recounting of frustration, streaked with simple phrases so conversational that on first hearing they fly by without registering. For example: "He's got a one-hand feel on the steering wheel, the other on my heart." Not one hand here and another there; first comes a "one-hand feel," and then the asymmetrical "hand"—on someone else's heart, not his own. The song's tension is that Swift and her man don't have a song to call their own; its genius is that they never pick one—their romance is the song, and both characters get a chance to narrate. Swift, the writer, also gets to transubstantiate; their song is their life as she describes it. He says, "Our song is the slamming screen door, sneakin' out late, tapping on your window." She says, "Our song is the way he laughs, the first date, man, I didn't kiss him, and I could have." There may be two characters, but there's only one songwriter, and this time the writer is keeping pretty august company: "And when I got home, before I said amen, asking God if he could play it again." Life is their song, a lark in a car, with the Deity himself co-writing.

Swift's new release is one of the few albums I can imagine selling truly astonishing numbers in today's timid, parched market. While Swift's début was a happy shock, driven by several unexpectedly good songs, "Fearless" is a streamlined machine without a bad track, appropriate for all ages and demographics. Cynics may be able to resist it, precisely because the marks are all hit so deliberately. "The Best Day" will dissolve anyone with children, and might become the official Mother's Day song. (It's sung to her mom.) The album's finest effort, "Fifteen," will feature in yearbook quotes for years.

In that song, Swift has unpacked the emotional math of being fifteen. The mood is undecided, switching among remorse, reflection, and an understanding that belongs as much to adults as it does to the tweens who will be performing renditions on YouTube the day the album is released. " 'Cause when you're fifteen and somebody tells you they love you, you're gonna believe them" is the first line of the chorus, and it sounds much more like the comforting words of a parent than like the quixotic pride of a young romantic. When the redheaded best friend, Abigail, is disappointed by a boy, Swift drops back, underplaying a sorrow that probably felt like surgery without anesthesia: "Abigail gave everything she had to a boy who changed his mind, and we both cried." In weaker hands, this song would be littered with broken hearts; Swift's boy just "changed his mind." In twenty years, when Swift has a songbook as long as her hair, "Fifteen" will sound no different. Will Swift sing to her daughter then the way she sings to her mother now? ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

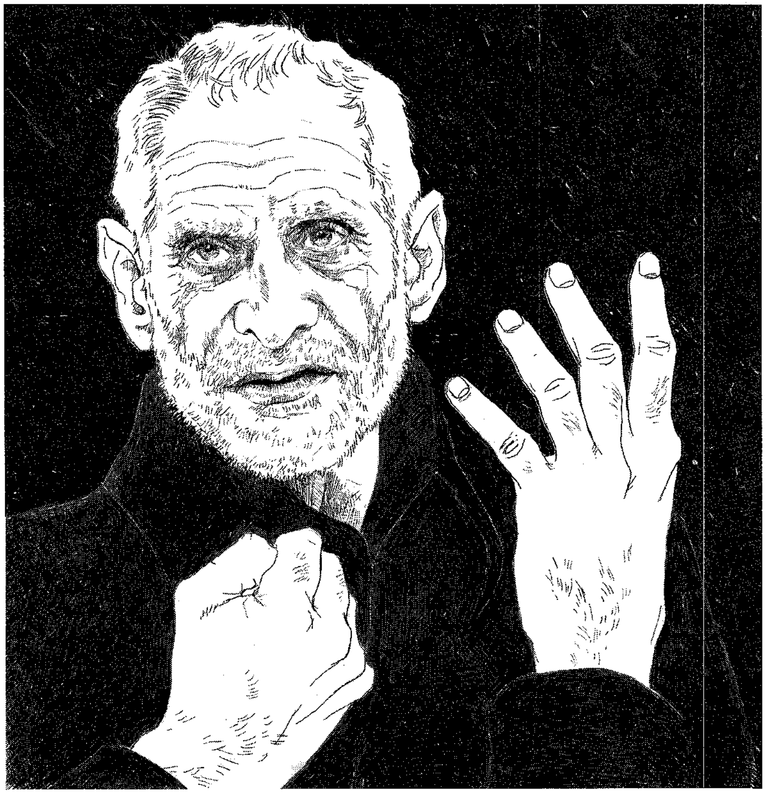
Sasha Frere-Jones's pop-music blog.

THE THEATRE

HERETICS

Peter Brook on the politics of belief.

BY HILTON ALS



Bruce Myers as narrator and interrogator in "The Grand Inquisitor."

HOPE GANGLOFF

As a child, the director Peter Brook, the son of Latvian Jews who emigrated to Britain in 1914, showed an interest in photography, along with other aspects of the mechanics of illusion. He staged his own version of "Hamlet" in the family living room, writing on the script's title page, " 'Hamlet,' by William Shakespeare and Peter Brook"—an early auteur. During his student years at Oxford, where he began his directing career and counted the critic Kenneth Tynan as one of his friends, he was a cynosure, possessed of uncommon energy and ambition. After graduating, in 1943, he apprenticed in various repertory companies in and around London, staging works ranging from Jean Cocteau's "The Infernal Machine" to Shakespeare's "Love's Labor's Lost." Relatively quickly, he garnered acclaim in England's postwar theatre scene, in part because he bucked the country's tendency toward politeness, both on and off the stage.

Unlike most directors before him, Brook did not treat Shakespeare's texts as sacrosanct. If a line seemed to drag, he cut it. He also found young actors, like Paul Scofield, whose inner restlessness was not stagy but existential, reflective of the times. ("The theatre has no categories, it is about life," Brook declared in his 1993 book, "The Open Door." "This is the only starting point, and there is nothing else truly fundamental. Theatre is life.") In other words, he ushered a new reality into the British theatre—a "kitchen sink" rawness that likely paved the way for such playwrights as John Osborne and Shelagh Delaney to bring their own down-and-dirty view of English life to the stage.

Again and again, Brook criticized Britain's class system—and anthropological view of the world—by making work that was implicitly political, and intensely beautiful in its philosophical sweep. His mature work as a director began in 1963, with his excruciating and brilliant film adaptation of William Golding's "Lord of the Flies." He further explored the worlds where politics and madness converge in his production of Peter Weiss's ingenious "Marat/Sade" (1964). (For this show, which transferred from London to Broadway, Brook won the Tony Award for Best Director, in 1966.) In both projects, Brook drew on his interest in the poet and playwright Antonin Artaud's "theatre of cruelty," seeking to jolt spectators into a heightened awareness of the performance taking place before them. Instead of resorting to the standard props of violence—guns, knives, poison—Brook had his actors use their voices as weapons of destruction; they screamed at one another or beat their chests or grimaced, and rarely smiled. Brook not only made physical and extreme the metaphors that Artaud and Jean Genet, for instance, used in their work to describe the brutalization of a mechanized society; he disassembled the concept of a theatrical troupe entirely and reassembled it in many different ways, largely by inspiring an emotional openness—even nakedness—during the rehearsal process, which was never-ending. (Brook is a great believer in improvisation and revision.) Brook's greatest star during this period was Glenda Jackson, who once recalled, of auditioning for Brook:

> One had to do an audition, which Peter and his assistant director Charles Marowitz ran. You were told to go with a prepared piece and so I went and was told to do my prepared piece but within the context of a woman who opens her front door and is immediately bundled into a straightjacket and taken off to a lunatic asylum. . . . No one had ever asked me to do that kind of work in my life before, and I have to say it was an oasis in the desert. First of all, Brook was somebody who paid us the great compliment of believing that we were what we said we were, namely actors, and therefore we could do absolutely anything that was demanded of us. . . . Essentially he was looking for

something that was not rooted—as I think British theatre was at that time—in a literary exposition of emotion.

Like his parents, Brook eventually left his native land. In France, in 1971, he founded the International Centre for Theatre Research, a group of actors, musicians, and dancers, which toured extensively in the Middle East and Africa; in 1974, he opened a permanent stage for the troupe at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, in Paris. From there, the artist stretched his canvas even further, staging, for example, in 1985, the Indian epic poem "The Mahabharata." But despite the grandness of his vision—which was influenced by Samuel Beckett and Jerzy Grotowski, as well as by Artaud—Brook always insisted on an intimacy with his spectators, on a constant awareness of who they were in relation to the play they were watching. (He opened a 1994 speech with "Good evening. Now you must help me, because it is impossible to talk without knowing who one's talking to.")

The idea of intimacy is put to the test, however, in Brook's latest production, "The Grand Inquisitor" (at the New York Theatre Workshop), in part because the text he uses is deeply old-fashioned—a throwback to the "literary exposition of emotion" that Jackson cheered Brook for disavowing more than forty years ago. Adapted by Marie-Hélène Estienne from a chapter of Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov," "The Grand Inquisitor" takes up Ivan's story, told to his brother Alyosha, of Christ's return to earth during the Spanish Inquisition—a parable about freedom and wretchedness, spiritual happiness and political debasement. The tale takes place in Seville. Christ comes back to life and performs several miracles. Once again, he is beloved by his followers. Arrested by the Catholic Church, he is brought before the Grand Inquisitor, who asks, "Why have you come to disturb us?" Then, once again, he is forsaken.

The distinguished actor and frequent Brook collaborator Bruce Myers plays both Ivan, telling the story, and the Grand Inquisitor, enacting it. Myers is dressed in a long black jacket and trousers, and speaks in mellifluous tones that convey the gravity of his role and his seriousness about the whole endeavor. From time to time, he sits across from a silent Christ (Jake M. Smith), who, like us, observes him as he displays both the dastardly calm of an executioner and the vague contempt of a man who believes himself to be more enlightened than his brother. Myers uses his long fingers and long feet like an insect's antennae—feeling his way through nuance and the dark world the text describes. He shows us the Grand Inquisitor's sensitivity by having him refuse to look at Christ: Christ's vulnerability would be too much for the Grand Inquisitor to bear. And what could be more shaming to a big man whose duty it is to kill than to feel his victim's softness, to be forced to register pity or forgiveness? Myers performs both of his roles with elegance—he is fundamentally relaxed—but his skill only underscores the clotted nature of the script he has to deliver. Onstage, ideas are best illustrated, not spoken. And, as this fifty-five-minute monologue drags on and on, Myers begins to seem more like a windbag than like an authority.

When, at the end of the piece, Jesus gets up from his chair, kisses his murderer, and walks offstage, we are left in a baffled state. What have we just witnessed? Anything, aside from a stream of words that even Myers, with his supreme artistic delicacy, was unable to infuse with drama? "The Grand Inquisitor" doesn't express intimacy; it lectures about spirituality—a deep interest of Brook's for decades. But listening to information about belief is far less satisfying than watching someone be transformed by it, a point that Brook himself made, time and again, in his earlier work, which showed just how sacred the stage can be. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Barton (Vt.) Chronicle

Newport City Police officer Jennifer Harlow says in an affidavit that she went to the Rendezvous Bar on January 21 to investigate a report of women fighting. One of the women, officer Harlow said, had called the other a "crack whore." The woman denied the insult saying she was a "heroin whore."

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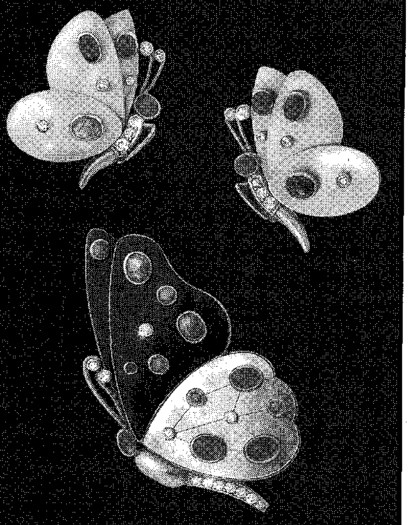

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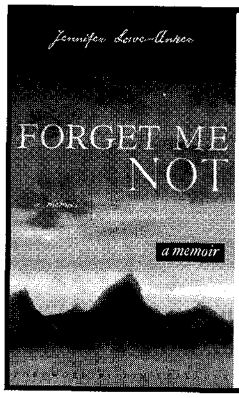

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THE ART WORLD

ANGRY YOUNG MAN

Joan Miró at MOMA.

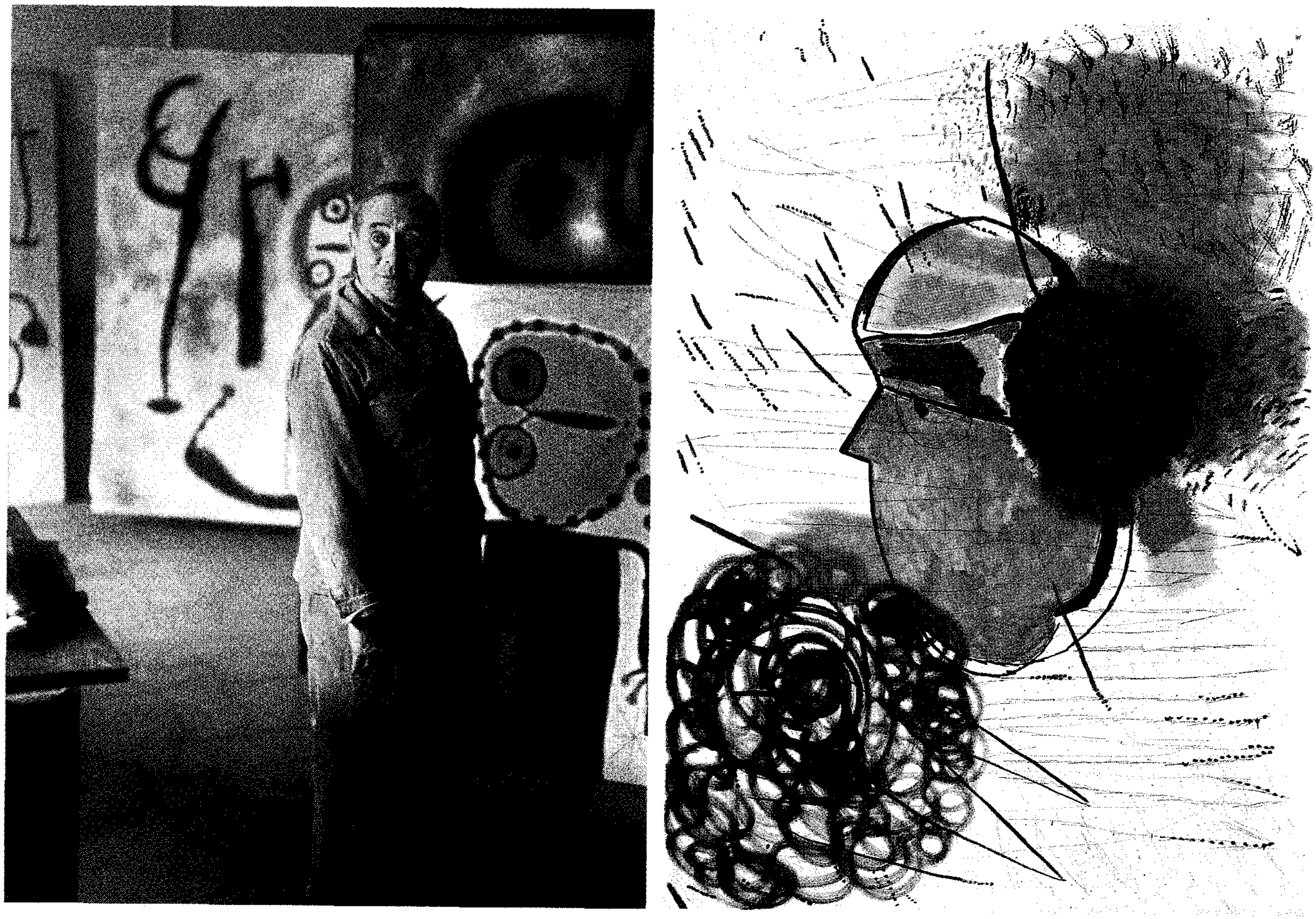
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"I want to assassinate painting," Joan Miró is reported to have said, in 1927. Four years later, the Catalan modern master elaborated, in an interview: "I intend to destroy, destroy everything that exists in painting. I have utter contempt for painting." (He is quoted, along similar lines, as having put the Cubists on notice: "I will break their guitar.") Brave words, for a painter. Miró, who first came to Paris in 1920, when he was twenty-six, plainly enjoyed indulging in the slash-and-burn attitudinizing of the avant-garde, despite being essentially a plain man, of equable temperament. He had reason to think that he meant it, and not just because he was of the generation that, in the wake of the high-minded slaughter of the First World War, was disgusted with European civilization. Fustian brought out the best in him. An eventful show now at the Museum of Modern Art, "Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927-1937," explores dizzyingly rapid-fire, experimental developments in the artist's work, influenced by Dadaism, Surrealism, and the savage materialism of the writer Georges Bataille. (In no other period was the ingenuously intuitive Miró so receptive to intellectual impetus.) With cultivated "automatist" spontaneity, he worked on raw canvas, copper, and the recently invented Masonite; employed gross materials, including sand and tar; made thoroughly abstract pictures; and hatched funky varieties of collage and assemblage, whose influence would extend to Robert Rauschenberg. It's not his fault—or is it?—that the show leaves an impression of being distant and dated, and strangely tame.

Miró was born in Barcelona, in 1893. His father, a goldsmith and a watchmaker in the era of Barcelona's prominence as a hub of Art Nouveau architecture and design, insisted that his son pursue a practical career. After two years as an accounts clerk, Miró had some sort of nervous breakdown, which won him permission to go his own way. A rebellious student in Barcelona's art academies, he emulated Cézanne, Fauvism, and Cubism, and thrilled to the dash of the Futurist manifestos. In a letter he wrote while miserably serving in the Spanish Army (having been conscripted in 1915), Miró hymned modernity: "Let's transplant the primitive soul to ultramodern New York, inject his soul with the noise of the subway, of the 'el,' and may his brain become a long street of buildings 224 stories high. . . . Down with Rome, down with Venice and all that has been." A key phrase there is "the primitive soul." Miró identified with Catalan folk traditions, which became the anchor of his first mature works, including "The Farm" (1921-22), a phantasmagoria of boldly outlined rustic details, which was bought and praised by Ernest Hemingway. (It's now a treasure of the National Gallery in Washington.) In Paris, where Miró was embraced by André Breton's Surrealist movement, he developed the image repertoire of brightly colored blobs and squiggles, overlaid with sharp linear glyphs, which became his trademark. Among his closest colleagues were Max Ernst, Jean Arp, and André Masson. With Ernst, in 1926, he collaborated on a production of "Romeo and Juliet" by Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes—an accommodation to *haut bourgeois* taste that provoked Breton and the poet Louis Aragon to denounce both artists, in a handbill distributed at the première, for having "abandoned their class." The attack wounded Miró, but he was unrepentant. The event seems to have fuelled his anarchic fury at the onset of the decade covered by the MOMA show.

The exhibition, crisply installed by the curator Anne Umland, begins at a moment subsequent to "The Birth of the World" (1925), which is in MOMA's collection, and other innovative paintings in which vestigial forms float in washy fields of unbounded color. These works are often regarded as direct ancestors of the discomposed, "all over" pictorial space of Abstract Expressionism. They remain Miró's most indelibly radical creations. What came next—twelve distinct series of works, arrayed chronologically in the show—was inventive enough, but to find it shocking today requires an effort of imagination. The sole exception, for me, is a group of four large canvases, each about seven by five feet, with which, in 1930, Miró announced a farewell to painting, in favor of collage and found-object, assembled sculpture. These are the only Mirós I know that don't look like Mirós. One of them, "Painting (Head)," presents a crudely cartooned profile in pink, a cluster of scribbles in blue, slack splotches of pink and black, and a smattering of horizontal, scratchy lines, all on a starkly white ground. It could pass for a contemporary work in a Chelsea gallery, perhaps heralding a new associate of the lyrically slovenly German painter Albert Oehlen. The painting channels the spirit, rather than illustrating the idea, of Bataille's proposed reduction of art, by "successive destructions," to base matter. It's terrific, escaping a chronic quality that kept Miró's creativity on a leash all his life: charm. Despite his most barbaric intentions, he could rarely help but please.

The glory and the problem of Miró are vivid at the show's start, in handsomely austere paintings on raw canvas, sometimes with written inscriptions, from 1927, and in the series that follows them: reliefs of odd objects attached to wood or flocked paper. "Portrait of a Dancer" (1928)—a cork, a hatpin, and a feather, neatly conjoined on a white-painted board—struck me, when I came upon it, as maybe the single prettiest thing I'd ever seen. The going gets rougher with clamorous paintings very loosely based on classical Dutch art, gloomy abstractions derived from collages of mechanical illustrations, collages featuring sandpaper or aluminum-coated paper, pastels of clownishly sexualized personages (with abounding but not even remotely sensual phalluses and vulvae), and reliefs and sculptures made from wooden scraps, machine parts, rope, chains, a rusty padlock, and other detritus, overpainted here and there with Miróesque whimsies. But nothing subverts an inevitable epithet for this artist—“poetic”—which seems to me equivocal. How is it a signal virtue for an art other than poetry to be poetic? (Is poetry better if it's painterly, or photography if it's cinematic?) Miró's campaign against painting can seem an excuse for evading the rigors intrinsic to the medium. This point registers, by contrast, in highly disciplined, very small, painstakingly detailed paintings of surrealistic panoramas on Masonite or copper, made in 1935 and 1936. I've decided that those on copper are my favorite Mirós. Viewed up close, their puddled brushstrokes, in relation to the limits of the surface, achieve ravishing effects of scale. My body feels miniaturized. I'm engulfed, and overwhelmed, in a Hieronymus Bosch-like parallel world.



Miró in his studio, in Barcelona, and his “Painting (Head)” (1930), channelling the spirit of Georges Bataille.

LEFT: HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON/MAGNUM; RIGHT: © 2008 ARS, NY/COURTESY MOMA

The show ends with a one-off coda: MOMA's own “Still Life with Old Shoe” (1937), a smoldering composition—in hellishly acidic colors, like lethal inflammations, and coal black—of a shoe, a fork stuck in a shrunken apple, a crust of bread, and a gin bottle wrapped in paper, all on a table that reads as a prairie, in fleeing depth, under an angry sky. “Old Shoe” commenced a return, for Miró, to painting from life, after his experimental adventures. It is commonly regarded as the artist's response to the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, and perhaps to his countryman Picasso's “Guernica.” As such, it fails, evincing a potent pictorial rhetoric that might have well served a painter who, unlike Miró, had something to say, beyond indicating a bad mood. Miró was an art-for-art's-sake innocent, first and last. In contrast to Picasso and Matisse, he gives remarkably little sign of experienced life in his works, as lively as they may be. His symbols of sex suggest prepubescent, wild guesses at what adults get so steamed up about. (Miró had one wife, Pilar Juncosa, on whom he seems to have depended heavily; they had one child, Dolores.) “Old Shoe” aside, his art—given, after 1937, to often strong styles in abstract painting and rather weak styles in sculpture, ceramics, and tapestry—generates no human drama beyond the range of a circus act. This was no disadvantage to Miró's reputation in the days and ways of high modernism, which exalted formal originality as gripping enough, in and of itself. Today, the diminishing returns of innumerable innovations later, many of us have come to rank values of meaning above those of brilliance. So, yes, the fault of Miró's vitiated appeal is his, though I believe that I speak for a consensus in declaring that he is forgiven. ♦

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More art from MOMA's Miró show.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

DIRTY SECRETS

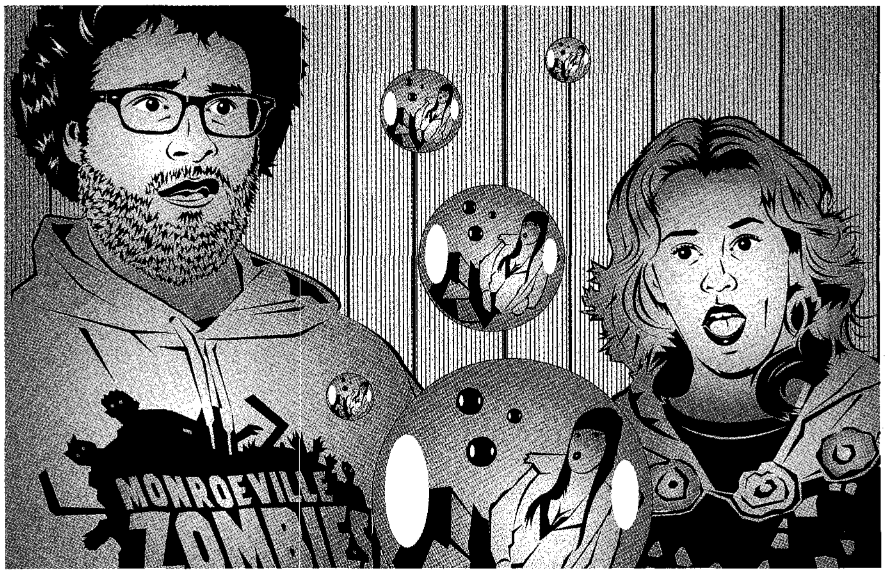
"Zack and Miri Make a Porno" and "I've Loved You So Long."

BY DAVID DENBY

In America, no frolic of innocence can last longer than its first gathering of hollyhocks. Just two weeks ago, the exuberant "High School Musical 3," with its Albuquerque teens bursting into song and dance, opened in theatres as the latest incarnation of the old Mickey Rooney–Judy Garland musicals. Well, a new revelation is at hand. Kevin Smith's comedy, the foul-tongued, bare-limbed "Zack and Miri Make a Porno" is another twist—God help us—on those cheerful M-G-M entertainments. Zack (Seth Rogen) and Miri (Elizabeth Banks), friends since before high school, and now intimate but chaste roommates, are suffering through the chilly boredom of a Pittsburgh winter. Zack works in a Starbucks-like coffee shop; Miri appears to work at a mall. In any case, they can't pay the bills, and the power and the water have been shut off. They need some money fast, and porn, they reason, has "gone mainstream," so why shouldn't they make some? Porn will turn the lights back on. Unlike the kids in the Rooney-Garland "Babes in Arms," they have no particular talents, and only one of them is pretty to look at, but, for the sake of the movie, they will make out in front of the camera. To complete the cast, they hold auditions, gathering together a ragtag group of friends and strangers, along with a couple of babes in thongs from a local strip club. (Smith recruited the adult-movie pros Katie Morgan and Traci Lords for the job.) Then they start shooting, befouling Zack's coffee shop after it closes its doors for the night.

The movie begins with church bells ringing in mournful disapproval of the filth that is about to be set before us. Kevin Smith, now thirty-eight, is the potty-mouthed boy from New Jersey who established himself as an apostate with "Dogma" (1999) and as a chronicler of the underemployed with such comedies as "Clerks" (1994), "Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back" (2001), and "Clerks II" (2006). His heroes are not so much slackers (they often have jobs) as they are unambitious, easily offended young men preoccupied with the small but furiously important issues of manners, respect, and hoped-for sex. Now that we're in a recession, Smith's turn toward entrepreneurial angst feels like the right idea, and the let's-put-on-a-porn-show impulse is certainly promising. But I wish that Dionysus or Priapus or whatever god Smith prays to had made the movie funnier.

The name of the film shot at the coffee shop is "Swallow My Cockaccino," which should give you some idea of the level of the movie's wit. Porn, of course, depends on a parasitic relationship with the rest of the culture, high and low, and it is often close to spoof to begin with. (While taking a class on Melville forty years ago, I was disconcerted to see the title "Thar She Blows" on a local theatre marquee.) In Smith's movie, the characters compete to come up with a title for their movie based on that of a regular feature film—"American Booty" and "Lawrence of A'Labia" are about as good as it gets—and there is a brief fantasia in which actors dress up as characters from "Star Whores," but it's more a costume party than an orgy. A lot of the comic ideas last for just a shot or two. When a complete sequence becomes necessary, Smith makes fun of the hapless mini-scenarios of porn—the delivery man at the housewife's door, the sudden urge to unzip, the simulated joy. As a parodist, however, he doesn't have much room for maneuver; he can only make silly material sillier. Gleeful to the end, he repeats his jokes over and over; some of the ideas must have been funnier to think about as minor outrages than they are to watch in a movie. His resources as a director are limited: the actors stand around in awkward clumps and grope each other clumsily. Smith got an R rating (rather than an NC-17) for his movie by making it lewd but never erotic—a classic American solution to the sex-comedy problem.



Seth Rogen and Elizabeth Banks in Kevin Smith's new movie.

In the midst of the moviemaking scenes, Smith attempts a love story. Zack and Miri, who have huddled together as outsiders ever since they met, are actually crazy about each other but can't admit it. Some of the rough, affectionate banter between Rogen and Banks is well written and well delivered. I must be getting used to Rogen. When he laid hands on Katherine Heigl in "Knocked Up," I was seriously alarmed—the beauty-and-the beast coupling seemed a violation of the basic principles of romantic comedy. But, to my amazement, I thought that he and the even lovelier Elizabeth Banks made a nice couple. In only a few movies, Rogen has established a persona—the underachiever, the slob loser, but a guy who is articulate, and slightly self-disgusted, and who finally pulls himself together. The flab and the soft features have become part of his junior-Falstaff appeal. He can be cast as the guy who gets the beautiful girl because, underneath all his basso bluster and dirty talk, he's a tender fellow. Staring in adoration at Banks, near the end of the movie, Rogen looks like a beatific bull.

Banks had a brief role as a girl ready for anything in "The 40 Year Old Virgin," and, as Laura Welch in Oliver Stone's "W.," she takes a shrewd, appraising look at Josh Brolin's George Bush—it's the film's best scene. This actress—reedlike, mobile, but always focussed—has a real sexual spark and so beguiling a smile that she can say obscene things and still seem fresh, and even classy. On the coffee-shop set, Zack and Miri make love for the first time (without undressing), and discover that they respond to each other. This moment of sexual awakening is meant to be overwhelmingly romantic, but, since lots of people are standing around idly watching, it comes off as somewhat less powerful than a Tristan-and-Isolde rapture. (I don't think we're meant to believe that they're exhibitionists.) Kevin Smith turns out to be reverent after all: he wants to separate true love from mere copulating for money, but his story mixes romance and porn so inextricably that he seems confused, and the movie trips over its own conceits.

Kristin Scott Thomas's elegant bone structure and slender frame make it hard to imagine her as a coarse-grained woman (though it would be fun to see her play one). She is an actress who suggests intelligence by not giving way to obvious emotions, and that taut withholding is part of her attraction—men, and women, too, want to pull her out of her shell. At times, she has hinted that something was seething underneath the beautiful mask: a struggle, perhaps, between desire and the need to maintain her soul in isolation. As Juliette, in the French film "I've Loved You So Long," Scott Thomas is first seen in closeup, without makeup, her hair lustreless, her expression blank but tense. This time, she's genuinely cut off, not just holding back. Juliette has recently completed a prison sentence of fifteen years for the unimaginable crime of murdering her six-year-old son. Her kid sister, Léa (Elsa Zylberstein), a university professor in the city of Nancy, nervously gathers her into her own family, where Juliette remains in an uneasy state of semi-silence. The movie—which is the directorial début of the novelist Philippe Claudel, who also wrote the script—asks whether anyone who has done something so extreme can be welcomed back into a full human community. And does she *want* to be welcomed back? Scott Thomas wears a colorless print shirt and a brown skirt, and she carries herself as if she were still a prisoner. She lets a man pick her up in a bar, and, later, when he asks her if the sex was good, she offers a blunt "No, not at all." Scott Thomas's bleak self-sufficiency has never been more daunting or more fascinating.

"I've Loved You So Long" is one of those French movies which embed their characters in a robust bourgeois culture: a network of family, friends, and colleagues; a dailiness of cafés, cigarettes, and dinner parties. Difficult as Juliette's situation is, Americans may be struck by how many chances she has for connection. Here, emerging from prison, she would likely be thrown into a much more severe and fragmented gray zone of indifference. Her sister, for one, ardently wants to break through to her and introduce her to people. Despite a big difference in their ages, Juliette and Léa were once close, and the movie is as much Léa's story as it is Juliette's. Claudel turns out to be very good at the psychology of intimacy. An observant man, he has assembled a large (and, to us, unknown) cast of actors around his star, and he dramatizes her slow reawakening with an infinite number of small, sharply etched details. But Claudel goes wrong in managing the nature of Juliette's crime. When you find out, at the end of the movie, exactly what happened long ago, you feel a little cheated. But that error had the effect of making me want to see Kristin Scott Thomas's performance all over again—you may need to see "I've Loved You So Long" twice in order to see it once. ♦

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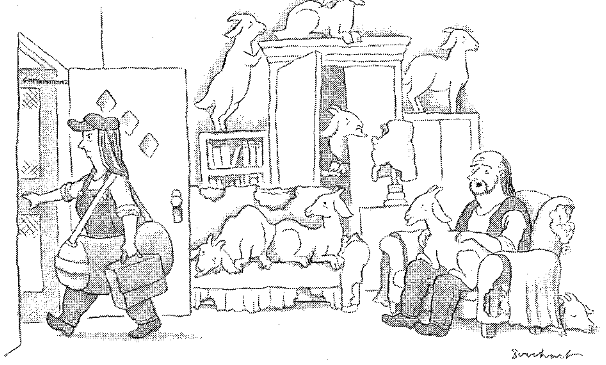
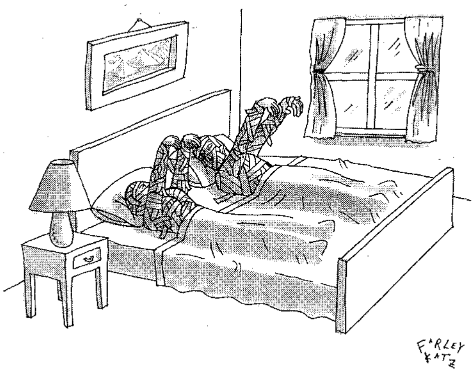
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, November 9th. Finalists in the October 27th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 24th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Come sweater season, you'll be back."
Travis Gosselin, Chicago, Ill.



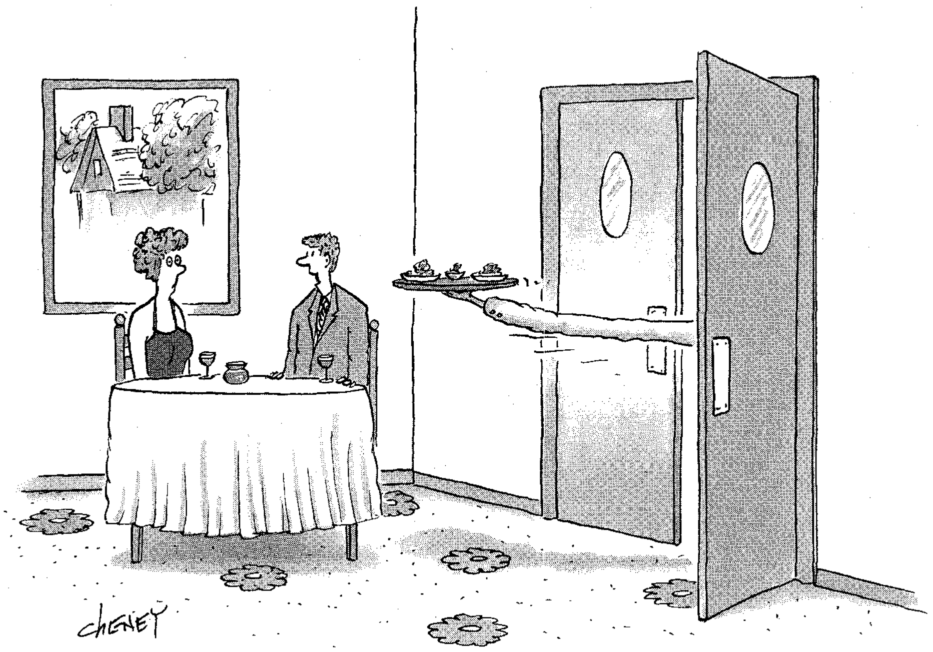
THE FINALISTS

"It feels good to get out of the museum for a night."
Frank Campanella, New York City

"No, no—you're the archeologist this time!"
Eric Reid, Natick, Mass.

"This should keep Emily from running to our bed every time she has a bad dream."
Sami Haque, Carol Stream, Ill.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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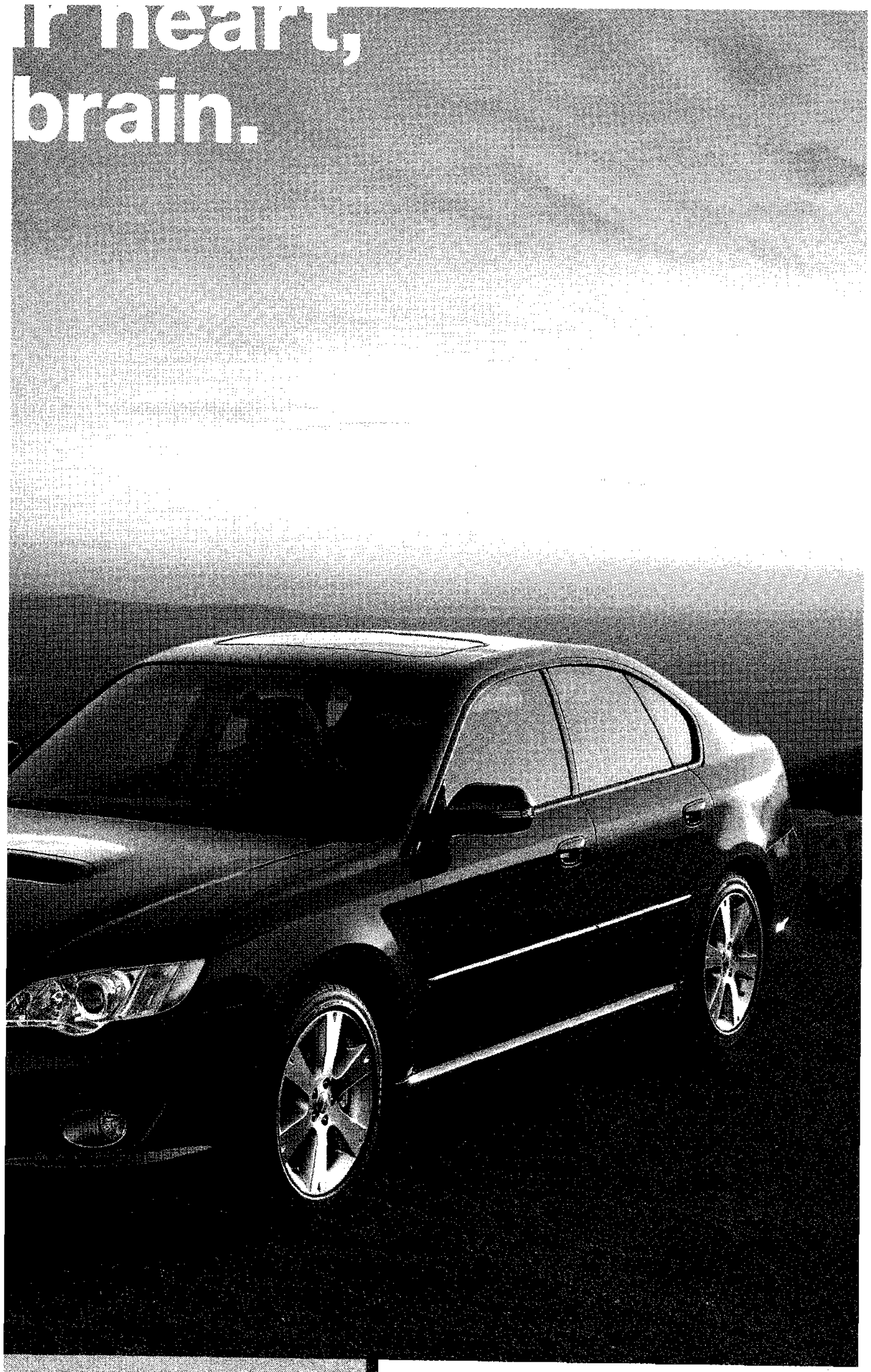
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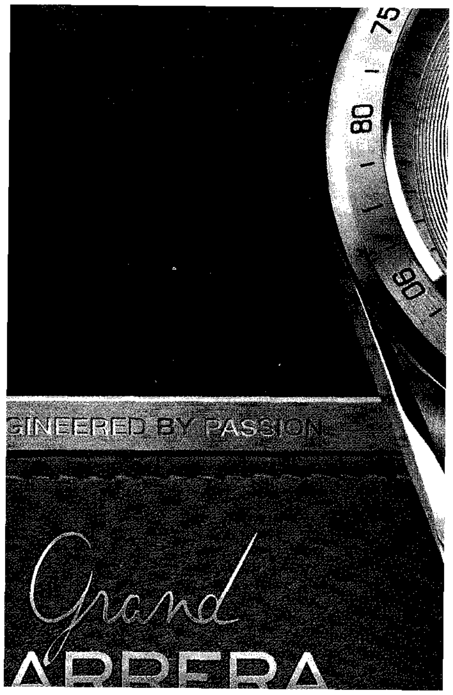
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